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MORAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ESTIMATES OF THE STATE AND FACULTIES OF MAN; AND OF THE NATURE AND SOURCES OF HUMAN HAPPINESS.

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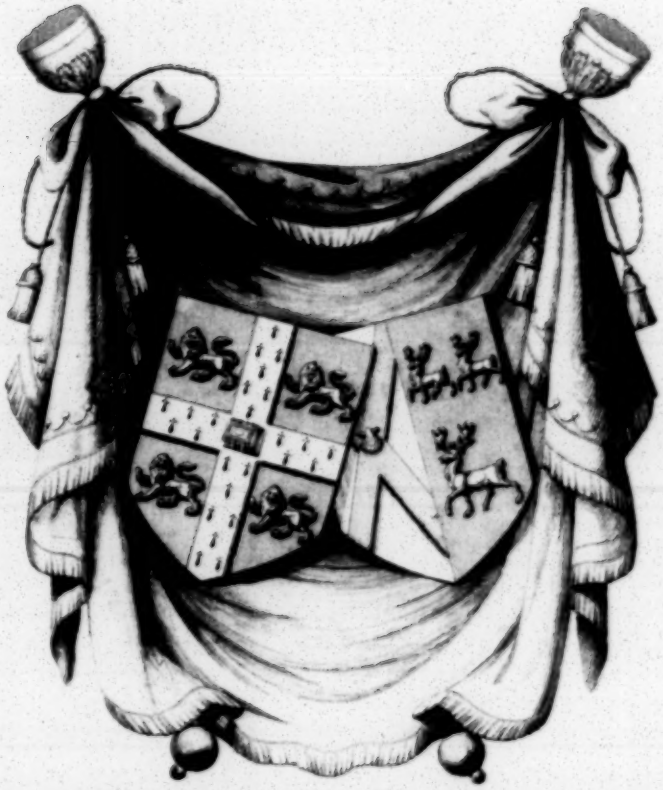

Academiæ Cantabrigiensis
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ESTI-

ESTIMATE XI.

THE VALUE OF SENSIBILITY.

And Joſeph ſaid unto his brethren, I am Joſeph; —Doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not anſwer him: for they were troubled at his preſence. And Joſeph ſaid unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you; and they came near; and he ſaid: I am Joſeph,—your brother—whom ye ſold into Ægypt.

Gen. xlv. 3, 4.

THE

VALUE

OF

SENSIBILITY.

THE teacher of religion muſt, like all other teachers, apply himſelf to the wants of his hearers and diſciples. He muſt diſcourſe to them in that language which is moſt intelligible to them; muſt rectify ſuch of their opinions, as ſtand moſt in need of it; and rouſe them from ſuch faults as moſt frequently and moſt eaſily gain the aſcendancy over them. And when it happens that more is thought and ſpoken of certain matters than uſual, and this in words or expreſſions, the ſignification whereof is yet fluctuating and unſettled, he muſt

not let it eſcape his attention, nor exclude it from his diſcourſes and exhortations, whenever the ſubject is of the moral kind, and has or may have an influence on the conduct and the happineſs of his hearers. Accordingly, Sirs, I take this to be the caſe with Senſibility; of which we hear a great deal at preſent, and yet is a word much oftener uſed than rightly underſtood. And, as this is a matter which may produce much good and much harm, occaſion much happineſs and much miſery, I think I ſtand in need of no farther excuſe if I make an attempt to admoniſh you on this matter, and to caution you againſt the abuſe of it.

In this deſign I have read to you a paſſage from the hiſtory of Joſeph, wherein his character is depicted as abounding in ſenſibility. The ſtrongeſt ſentiments of love, and tenderneſs, the nobleſt generoſity, ſo overwhelm his ſoul, that he breaks out into tears, when he declares himſelf to his brethren.

brethren. All the eminence and ſovereignty with which he was inveſted, as the deliverer of Ægypt, and the viceroy of its king, could neither ſuppreſs nor weaken in him the warmeſt emotions of filial and fraternal love, nor prevent the natural demonſtrations of them. He felt the pure and innocent delight a man enjoys in the boſom of his family, the uncommon happineſs of finding loſt friends again, and the ſtill greater felicity of forgiving the injurious, of comforting the afflicted, and of reſtoring the diſpirited to their former vigour. And he preferred this pleaſure, and this happineſs, to all the ſplendour and all the luxuries afforded him by his preſent elevated condition. "I am Joſeph, your brother. Doth my father yet live? Come near to me. Now, be not grieved; nor think that I am angry. God hath brought this to paſs. It is he that hath done it all. Oh happy me, that I am able to preſerve and provide for you, and yours!" Who

can here miſtake the language of the heart, the moſt generous, the moſt ſentimental heart!

But we are not to ſtop here. Our deſign is to conſider the matter itſelf in all its latitude; and, as far as may be done in ſuch a diſcourſe, ſet it in a proper light. In this view we ſhall have three queſtions to diſcuſs.

The firſt is, What is ſenſibility?

The ſecond, What is true, generous, and laudable ſenſibility? And

The third, What is falſe and blameable ſenſibility?

For acquiring a juſt idea of ſenſibility, we muſt take care not to confound it with ſenſitiveneſs, or ſimply take them for one and the ſame. When we are eaſily affected

fected by the things we ſee, and hear, and feel; or by the repreſentations we form to ourſelves of abſent, viſible, ſpiritual ſubjects; or by the images which our imagination or inventive faculty holds up to us, of mere poſſibilities or of actual exiſtences; when the agreeable or diſagreeable impreſſions which either of them make upon us ſink deep, and eaſily and ſuddenly ſeize upon our whole ſenſitive faculty, eaſily and ſuddenly move us to joy or to ſorrow, to weeping or to laughter, to love or to hatred, to zeal or to anger, to tranſports of delight, or to the pungency of affliction; we are then acutely ſenſitive: and, when this ſenſitiveneſs is ennobled and exalted; when it chiefly diſplays itſelf in regard to moral objects, to more refined beauties, and to ſublimer pleaſures; when it ſharpens our ſentiments of what is right and wrong, good and bad, becoming and unbecoming, generous and ungenerous; and makes us readily obſerve and acutely

feel this difference in ſuch things, perſons, actions, and events, wherein the generality of mankind perceive and feel nothing,—then are we ſenſible. A few antithetical exemplifications will ſet this matter in a more perſpicuous light. The merely ſenſitive man is rather moved by the ſurface and the exterior of things; the man of ſenſibility more by their intrinſic qualities and real excellency. The former is in particular eaſily moved to diſpleaſure and to anger; the other is adapted to all, and chiefly the gentler, nobler kinds of ſentiments. The former is more agitated by ſtrong and violent impreſſions; the latter more touched and affected by the milder and more gentle. The former is more ſenſible to the grand, the extraordinary, and the ſtriking; the latter, more to the fine, the noble, the unobſerved and deſpiſed beautiful and good. The ſenſitive man is irritated at the injury he receives or is offered; the man of ſenſibility is troubled like-

likewiſe on account of the injury his enemy is doing to himſelf, and the affliction he is preparing for himſelf, ſooner or later to undergo. The ſenſitive man is more frequently moved to compaſſion by the loud complaints and the copious tears of the unhappy; the man of ſenſibility is alſo affected by the ſilent expreſſions of the pain, the troubles, and the want which he intereſts himſelf in, in regard of every creature. The ſenſitive man loves rather gay and noiſy pleaſures and diverſions; the man of ſenſibility ſeeks moſt the charms of quiet, domeſtic, gentle joys. The ſenſitive man rejoices in the good actions of the philanthropiſt and the patriot; the man of ſenſibility is likewiſe delighted in the tears that ſtand in the eyes of the child, when he hears of noble deeds, which he wiſhes to have done himſelf. The ſenſitive man is full of feeling towards whatever has a viſible and intimate influence on himſelf and his; the man of ſenſibility is alſo

moved by the remoter and more hidden conſequences of things; and nothing is totally foreign to him, nothing indifferent, that relates to any living being capable of feeling and of happineſs. In ſhort, ſenſibility is enlarged, refined and generous ſenſation; it is either a higher degree, a peculiar direction or diſpoſition, or a nobler uſe and exhibition of it.

Now, if ſenſation be of itſelf a true and honourable prerogative of man, then ſenſibility muſt be as much ſo and more. But, as the former may be ſometimes rightly employed, ſometimes abuſed, and therefore ſometimes uſeful, and at others hurtful, to mankind, ſo likewiſe it fares with the latter. There is a real and a falſe, a laudable and a blameable, an innocent and a dangerous ſenſibility. Let us ſee wherein they both conſiſt, and whereby they may be diſcriminated from each other.

Our

Our ſenſibility is, in the firſt place, of the right kind, it is generous and reſpectable, when directed to the beſt and nobleſt objects. There are undoubtedly certain objects that cannot make too ſtrong an impreſſion on us, which cannot too much affect us, which we cannot too deeply feel: and theſe are God, truth, innocence, virtue, human perfection, and happineſs; all that is beautiful, and great, and good, and honourable and amiable, and remaineth for ever. Therefore, if thou never thinkeſt, O man! upon thy God, without the higheſt reverence and filial love, as thy Creator and Father; if thou never conſidereſt his works without a chearful admiration, a genial enlargement of thy heart, and a lively ſenſe of the traces of his wiſdom, and goodneſs in the ſmaller as well as the larger parts of his creation; if never without tranſport, thou lifteſt up thine eyes to his magnificent heavens, or beholdeſt the numberleſs beauties of the earth,

earth, which he hath appointed for thy dwelling; if, not without inward delight, thou enjoyeſt his benefactions and bleſſings, or reflecteſt on his bounty and love; if, when thou ſeeſt thy fellow-creatures, thy brethren, and walkeſt and converſeſt with them, thou art not without a real intereſt in them; if thou art not deſtitute of inward ſatisfaction when thou art the witneſs of a good and generous deed, or obſerveſt the conqueſt of truth over error, and of virtue over vice; nor ſeeſt the triumph of unrighteouſneſs and iniquity without emotion, nor tyranny of any kind without the livelieſt diſpleaſure, nor ſuffering or corrupted innocence without deep concern; nor the perverſeneſs and miſery of thy fellow-creatures without actual ſorrow; if, when thou heareſt the voice of nature, of truth, and of noble ſimplicity, thou art not without pleaſure and delight, or the cry of the indigent not without hearty compaſſion, the ſighs of the deſtitute and afflicted not without pain and grief;

grief; in ſhort, when thou performeſt every act of private and public worſhip with a heart full of ſentiment, prayeſt with real ardour, feeleſt the whole value and the whole dignity of thy connection with God and with his ſon Jeſus Chriſt, art warmed and penetrated with love towards Jeſus Chriſt, and thy devotions are replete with comforts and bleſſings which thy heart can ſcarcely contain; then is thy ſenſibility directed to objects and placed upon objects that are worthy of it; then is it of the nobleſt kind, then does it turn to thy higheſt advantage, and is the ſource of perfection and happineſs to thyſelf and to others, for the preſent and the future world.

Our ſenſibility is, farther, of the proper kind; it is blameleſs, and a real advantage to man, when conſtantly under the dominion and guidance of reaſon. Sentiment, and therefore likewiſe ſenſibility, cannot be a ſafe direction to us on all occaſions. It is apt

apt to bias us too eaſily and too violently for or againſt a matter or a perſon; frequently moves us too much where we ought to be firm and immoveable; it renders us too often, from indulgence and favour, to be lenient towards one unjuſt perſon, and too ſevere againſt another; too often makes us tender towards the diſtreſſed from compaſſion, and hard againſt the ſucceſsful. It judges too frequently with partiality; abides too obſtinately by the firſt impreſſions made upon the heart; it allows itſelf to be cheated by the appearances of beautiful and good, by impoſing pretences, by moving words and geſtures. And, beſides, how many men are there who regard this reſpectable quality as weakneſs, and treat it accordingly, and are expert in taking advantage of it by a thouſand different means, and making it ſerve their diſhoneſt purpoſes! How neceſſary is it, then, that it ſhould be conſtantly under the controul of reaſon, that it ſhould have a clear

clear well-regulated underſtanding for its guide, if it would not be continually falling into error, if we would have it not more hurtful than profitable to ourſelves and to others! How many perſons of ſenſibility have thereby brought miſery on themſelves and others, or plunged themſelves into no ſmall ſtraights and difficulties, by not hearkening to the admonitions and remonſtrances of this conductor, and diſcarding reaſon with contempt as being too cold, too tedious, too intereſted a counſellor and guide! No; this muſt be the ruler of our ſoul, the director of our conduct; to this end the Creator hath beſtowed it upon us, and it is the true, the great prerogative of man, as a rational creature. It is this that muſt diſcriminate ſemblance from truth, that muſt teach us to ſacrifice even our beſt deſires to the performance of duty, to act, not according to fortuitous and extravagant ſentiments, but upon firm and immutable principles, and to controul and govern

govern ourſelves, though the conflict coſt never ſo much to our heart. Happy the man, who is thus taught of reaſon; whoſe eſſential character is compoſed of light and warmth, whoſe underſtanding is as enlightened as his heart is ſenſible!

In ſhort, our ſenſibility is of the proper kind, it is innocent and reſpectable, when it renders us active in doing good, when it incites to the beſt and moſt generous actions. To feel, to feel acutely, and not properly to manage our feelings, in general betrays weakneſs and effeminacy. To be ſenſible to goodneſs, and yet not perform that good, when we can and ought, is inconſiſtency and hypocriſy. To be ſatisfied with having good ſentiments, inſtead of doing good actions, is impoſture and ſelf-deceit. The feweſt emotions we have are ultimate objects; the generality are and muſt be no more than means, inducements, and incitements, to put us upon action, and to facilitate

litate the application and exertion of our faculties, and to aſſiſt us in the overcoming of many difficulties and dangers. What is the moſt enraptured admiration of the beautiful and the good, if it do not rouſe us to the imitation of it? What is the moſt pungent compaſſion, if it do not excite us to actual and immediate relief? What is the moſt extreme diſpleaſure, the moſt ardent zeal, when it does not carry us to the prevention of injuſtice, to the defence of the oppreſſed, to a ſtedfaſt ſupport of the cauſe of truth, and to add courage and ſtrength to the innocent? Of what uſe are ſighs, and tears, and lamentations, if, when we ought to be acting and working, aſſiſting others by counſel or deeds, they leave us irreſolute and motionleſs? What is the moſt paſſionate and hearty affection, unleſs it ſhew itſelf by actions? No; if we would have our ſenſibility of the proper kind, forwarded and improved by virtue, then we muſt not ſo

far ſurrender ourſelves up to it, as to let it exhauſt our faculties, and deprive us of the power to act. No; it muſt much rather impel us by an irreſiſtible force to all good and generous atchievements; and put away all conſiderations which might withhold us from them; ſecure us from any hurtful delay; overcome every diſpoſition to ſloth and eaſe; fortify us againſt every dread of difficulty and danger; and prompt us to well doing with as much zeal, as we have deeply felt the propriety of it; and the more active it renders us in theſe reſpects, the more reſpectable and honourable it is.

And this, Sirs, this is real, irreproachable, virtuous ſenſibility; which no man, who has a right turn of mind, and whoſe heart is not totally hardened, will venture to blame or to deſpiſe; which every man, who knows the value of things, muſt revere as a precious gift of the Moſt High, as a real

real prerogative of man. The caſe is quite otherwiſe with falſe ſenſibility. We need only to examine it a little for diſcovering it to be blameable and hurtful.

Senſibility is, in the firſt place, falſe, and blameable, when it is not natural, but forced; when a man expreſſes and pretends to feelings which he has not, or ſtrives to appear to have them in a far higher degree than he actually has: thus playing the part of a deſperate, a perfectly inconſolable man, when he is only moderately troubled and grieved; or falſely pretending to enjoy a heavenly tranſport and rapturous delight, when he only receives an ordinary pleaſure and a calm ſatisfaction in any particular thing. Nay, our ſenſations do not always depend upon ourſelves, are not always in our power; no man, in every inſtant of his life, and in every temperament of his body, is alike capable of the ſame degree of ſenſibility; neither mind nor body is always

able to endure an equally ſtrong tenſion and vibration: ſo that none need be aſhamed either of a deficiency of theſe ſtronger ſenſations, or of the accidental relaxation of them. Indeed, he that is always inſenſible, always unfeeling, whom nothing can move, is in no deſirable condition; and is criminal, if he has brought himſelf into it by folly and vice: yet likewiſe the moſt ſenſible man is not always alike conſtituted; and the greateſt wonders of the works of nature do not always ſtrike his view in the ſame manner; even upon the tendereſt heart, repreſentations of the indigence and miſery of a fellow-creature do not always make the ſame impreſſion. Whoever but approves the true, the beautiful, the good, and does that which he reckons his duty, need never be grieved if he perform it at times, as it were, though readily and chearfully, yet without any remarkably ſtrong ſenſation, with ſedateneſs and diligence. Whereas he

he that will exhibit the ſame ſenſations in every event, and is reſolved to feel in one circumſtance in the ſame manner and degree as in another, for the ſake of being reckoned a man of extraordinary ſenſibility, among thoſe with whom he is intimately connected by a uniformity of ſentiments and purſuits, muſt frequently act the hypocrite, muſt often lie, muſt often ſpeak and act in an unnatural manner: and no kind of diſſimulation and conſtraint more eaſily betrays itſelf, none makes a more diſagreeable impreſſion on thoſe that ſee it and hear it, than this. Senſations totally incompatible will frequently be exhibited at the ſame time; frequently the aid of the moſt contradictory geſtures and motions of the body will be called in; frequently all the energetical and moving expreſſions of language will be heaped on one another without judgement or choice; and many performances of this nature end in the ſneers and deriſion of the ſpectators.

Farther, ſenſibility is falſe and blameable, when it is overſtrained or exceſſive; when it is diſproportionate to the value of the object; when it is more diſplayed in trifles than in matters of importance. Many will hear the account of the demolition of a whole city by the horrors of an earthquake, of a fleet daſhed to pieces upon rocks, of an army deſtroyed by fire and ſword, with all the indifferency imaginable, who can ſhed tears over a comparatively inſignificant creature of the claſſes of plants or animals. On numbers, a whole life ſpent in toilſome, virtuous actions, but performed in ſilence, without any rumour or report, makes no impreſſion, who will fall into tranſports and extaſy at an act of humanity or beneficence, accidentally perhaps performed by another, but done with great ſhow, and diſplayed with much oſtentation. Many are ſcarcely moved, or even not at all, by indications of courage, fortitude of mind, reſolution, invincible patience and firm-

firmneſs; while, at any thing that ſhews tenderneſs or love, even though it be not perfectly innocent, they find reaſon to be moved in the higheſt degree. The man of ſenſibility, in the beſt and nobleſt ſenſe of the word, finds indeed matter for his ſenſibility to work upon in a thouſand events and ſubjects, where others would be abſolutely cold, which in their eyes would be inſignificant trifles; and it deſerves no reproach when a flower or a little inſect moves him, when he obſerves any expreſſion of exultation or ſuffering in any ſenſitive creature, that he is affected by it, and partakes of it all with a ſentimental heart: but he does not therefore overlook great and important concernments, is not cold towards them, takes ſtill more intereſt in them, will be ſtill more ſtrongly affected by them, does not fall into the ridiculous, but conſtantly preſerves the dignity of a thinking, rational, and ſelf-poſſeſſing man; and this it is that ſhews

his way of thinking and feeling to be no artificial ſentimentality, but true and generous ſenſibility.

Senſibility is, in the third place, illegitimate and blameable, when it is hurtful or dangerous to ourſelves and others; hinders us in our actual duties, or renders the performance of them diſagreeable and difficult; when it deprives us of the deſire and the ability to do what is right and good. He that ſuffers himſelf to be moved and overcome by the expreſſion of violent pain, by the ſight of ſufferings and miſery, as to be put beſide himſelf, to loſe his power of reflection and preſence of mind, and renders himſelf incapable of attending to the means, and to the application of the means by which pain may be eaſed, thoſe ſufferings mitigated, that miſery removed or aſſuaged; he that weeps and laments, where he ought and may relieve; his ſenſibility is hurtful and reproachable; and, though

though it be never ſo natural, is the ſickneſs of the ſoul, and the infirmity of the mind, which can never acquire the man any praiſe, which he ought not to cheriſh and maintain, but ſhould labour to guard himſelf againſt, with all poſſible care.

Senſibility is, again, hurtful, and conſequently criminal, when it renders us negligent in our behaviour towards others, and forgetful of the duties we owe them; when it deprives us of the reliſh for our ordinary affairs, takes us off from the proſecution of them, or tempts us to ſloth, and to regard them with diſlike and averſion. It is therefore hurtful, when a miſtreſs of a family allows it to be a hindrance to her in the careful attendance on her domeſtic employment, in the maintenance of regularity and order in all the parts of it, in her diligent endeavours to promote the welfare and ſatisfaction of her family, in her attention to ſmall things as well as

to

to great; when ſhe chuſes rather to indulge her ſenſibility in reading, or in converſing with ſentimental acquaintances, than addict herſelf to domeſtic and œconomical affairs; or will only extend her influence and inſpection in general over the whole, as if that could ſubſiſt without its parts, and the greater without the leſs.

Senſibility is hurtful and criminal, when the young man, or the man of buſineſs, is induced by it to think the concerns of his trade or vocation unworthy of him, and which perhaps are not very elegant and important in themſelves, or not highly entertaining, and thereupon to deſpiſe and neglect them, and to imagine that he degrades himſelf by paying attention to them, and by doing only ſuch things as a thouſand others of leſs delicate ſentiments, and of a leſs elevated mind, can perform as well as he. It is hurtful, when the diſciple of wiſdom is ſeduced by this propenſity of his

his heart to neglect the due cultivation of his underſtanding and reaſon, and to refuſe himſelf to ſerious and dry ſtudies, though of the higheſt importance for acquiring the knowledge and the ſciences, which are indiſpenſably neceſſary to his future profeſſion or ſtation in life.

Senſibility is hurtful and criminal when it leads a man to refrain from aſſociating with others, from the duties of converſation, company, friendly eſteem and love, becauſe they are not ſo ſentimental as himſelf; nature having probably formed them of groſſer materials, or addicted them more to cool and temperate reflection, given them more conſideration, and diſpoſed them more to action than to ſentiment.

Laſtly, ſenſibility is hurtful and dangerous, when it induces us, by its inſpirations and impulſes, to dream of a world, and to live and float in a world, which has hardly

hardly any thing in common with the actual ſtate of things, which exiſts only in our imagination, or in certain poems and works of fancy; when we are ſeduced, by ſuch repreſentations and images, to look for perfection in others, and to expect matters from them, which are either never, or very rarely, to be found; and then to trouble and afflict ourſelves at this natural defect, and to keep ourſelves at a diſtance from them, as if we were eſſential ſufferers by them. How many has this kept from making the moſt ſuitable and moſt advantageous connections! how many has it forced to paſs their days in a ſtate of celibacy! how many have thereby become bad huſbands, ſelfiſh, and auſtere, companions hard to be pleaſed, and downright miſanthropiſts! No; the wiſe man ſees, accepts, and uſes the things of this world as they are, and looks for no angels among mankind, no paradiſe upon the earth, no perfect virtue among frail and ſinful crea-

tures, no perfection there, where it is not to be found.

No; in all theſe caſes where we have pronounced ſenſibility to be hurtful and criminal, we ſacrifice obligations to pleaſure; render ourſelves indiſpoſed and unfit for the performance of our duty; perform it negligently; deſtroy the harmony and welfare of ſocial life; act againſt the deſigns of God and our own nature, by which we are ordained, not only to feel, but alſo to think, and, ſtill more, to act; we enervate our taſte and our heart; weaken our faculties; become faſtidious in the enjoyment of the beautiful and the good; ſeldom ſatisfied with what is and what has been; and prepare for ourſelves and others a thouſand ſufferings and a thouſand woes, from which the man in contrary caſes would be abſolutely free.

Guard yourſelves, therefore, Sirs, from this falſe, exceſſive, and hurtful ſenſibility. Let moderation and prudence be the guides of your heart. And, as you are chriſtians, in this reſpect look likewiſe to Jeſus, your conductor and chief, the pattern of all human perfection. How full of feeling was his heart; and how generous, how buſied, was his ſenſibility; how fruitful in good works! Whoſe ſoul was ever ſo thoroughly imbued with love towards God and man, with the love of truth and virtue, as his! What harmony of mind and heart, of words and works! He lamented over the people; he compaſſionated their ſpiritual and perſonal wants; but at the ſame time he gave them effectual relief; he filled and inſtructed them. He wept when he ſaw his friend Lazarus in the grave; but he awakened him from the dead. He felt and ſuffered the ſickneſs and pains of the wretched, and healed them. He ca-

reſſed

reſſed the little children that they brought unto him, and gave them his prayers. He viewed the young man who wanted to follow him, with affection and love, though his wiſhes were not brought to effect. He ſhed tears over Jeruſalem, while it was watching his motions with a murderous intent. He prayed for pardon for his tormentors; and forgot himſelf whenever he had an opportunity of ſerving and helping others. And what a concern he took in the welfare of his relations in the moſt calamitous moment of his life! "Behold," ſaid he from the croſs to his favourite diſciple, "Behold thy mother!" And to Mary, "Behold thy ſon!"—But how active was his whole life in all theſe reſpects! How unremitted his zeal in righteouſneſs and beneficence, in finiſhing the work that was given him to do! How clear and unclouded his intellect! How impartial his judgement! How unſhaken his fortitude!

How

How juſt and ſolid his principles! How great his indulgence to his diſciples and ſcholars, who were ſo much leſs ſenſible than he; who ſeemed at times almoſt totally void of feeling! How manly, in ſhort, was his whole diſcourſe, and his whole behaviour! How far from all conſtraint, all artifice, and all oſtentation! How adapted to his character, his vocation, and to temporary circumſtances! What noiſeleſs and tranquil dignity he diſplayed, in all he uttered, and in all he did!

Oh imitate him likewiſe in this, all ye who have the happineſs and the honour to be his confeſſors. Strive after the perfection of your nature with all the faculties of your ſoul. Attend to your underſtanding as well as to your heart. Cultivate it with no leſs care. Learn to think juſtly as well as to feel forcibly. Let your

your reaſon and your ſenſibility go hand in hand along the path of life. Let this be governed and directed by that, and that be encouraged and animated by this. Thus, you will neither be deficient in light, for avoiding all deviation and error; nor in warmth and force, for purſuing the right way, reſolute and indefatigable.

ESTIMATE XII.

THE VALUE OF VIRTUE.

Wiſdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be deſired are not to be compared to it.

Prov. viii. 11.

THE VALUE OF VIRTUE.

TO deſpiſe virtue, and not to prize it enough, are two very different matters. The former is a fault, of which only a few are capable; the latter is a failing, of which great numbers of perſons render themſelves guilty. Virtue, Sirs, is of ſo harmleſs, ſo venerable, and ſo captivating an aſpect; ſhe leaves us ſo little to fear, and allows us to hope for ſo much from thoſe with whom we perceive her, and by whom we ſee her act and operate; her ſentiments and her conduct are ſo juſt,

ſo harmonious, ſo natural, and ſimple; her connection with our happineſs, and with the welfare of the whole community, is in moſt caſes, at leaſt in many, ſo apparent; ſhe is frequently ſo indiſpenſably neceſſary, is conſtantly ſo beautiful, holds out ſo much indulgence and patience to the frail and feeble; that neither perſpicacity, nor erudition, nor habitual reflection, nor a higher degree of perſonal perfection, are requiſite for allowing her a certain value, for acknowledging her to be ſomething good and reſpectable, and for ſhewing her more or leſs eſteem. The wiſe and the ignorant, the good and the bad, the virtuous and the vicious, the conſiderate man and the thoughtleſs youth, are all of one accord in this general judgement on the value of virtue; and none will venture, unleſs he be under the deceitful influence of ſome violent paſſion, plainly and in direct terms to deſpiſe her. Wherever conſcience, wherever the ſentiment of truth and goodneſs

neſs ſtill remains in man, there virtue finds an advocate in the hearts of her enemies as well as of her friends, which dares not venture plainly to condemn her.

But, certain as this is, it is no leſs certain, that all men do not, that probably only the leaſt part of mankind acknowledge the whole value of virtue, and ſo highly prize, and ſo inwardly revere her, as ſhe deſerves. The reverence ſhewn to virtue is with great numbers more prejudice, or obſcure ſenſation, than vital reflected knowledge, real ſentiment, or firm internal conviction. They have a reſpect for virtue at large and in general; but not as it appears in every particular incident, and every particular perſon. They hold it, indeed, to be ſomething good and deſirable; but they ſeldom give it the decided preference to all other good and deſirable things, after mature conſideration, and by particular tokens. But ſeldom are we per-

ſuaded by ſincere conviction, that we muſt not part with it on any account, that we cannot purchaſe it at too dear a rate, nor make too great ſacrifices to it; that with it we poſſeſs all things, and without it nothing; that it is infinitely better to be poor, and mean, unlearned and deſpiſed, but virtuous, than to be rich and mighty, conſidered and learned, but not virtuous. And all our pretences to real virtue are idle and baſeleſs, ſo long as we do not believe and confeſs this truth, ſo long as we do not prefer it before every other advantage of life, however eſtimable and excellent.

To ſettle your judgement on this matter, Sirs, and to increaſe your reverence for virtue, is the deſign of my preſent diſcourſe. In ſeveral foregoing diſcourſes we have laid before you the value of riches, of honour, of ſenſual pleaſures, and of ſpiritual pleaſures; pronounced them all, ſo far as they are real, to be actual goods,

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to be objects which, in a certain degree, deſerve to be eſteemed, admired, ſought after, and enjoyed; to be things, which, according to the uſe we make of them, may contribute more or leſs to our perfection and happineſs. Uſeful and valuable, however, as all theſe things may be, virtue is ſtill far preferable to them, as far as the end is to the means, and as a ſtately edifice is preferable to the ſcaffoldings and implements that are neceſſary to its conſtruction.

Wiſdom, ſays the wiſe king in the Bible, wiſdom is better than rubies, and all the things that may be deſired are not to be compared to it. Wiſdom, in this paſſage, is not barely that which men uſually call underſtanding, knowledge, erudition, or profound penetration. It is the proper uſe of the underſtanding in all the affairs and tranſactions of mankind; the right application of the knowledge and ſagacity we poſſeſs, to the promoting of our felicity;

it is an intelligent conduct in harmony with truth and order; in ſhort, it is, in ſignification, exactly the ſame as what we imply by the word Virtue. This wiſdom, this virtue, is more precious than rubies; all that we can poſſibly deſire is not to be compared to it; that is, its value is ſuperior to the value of all other things which uſually men paſſionately deſire, and moſt earneſtly ſtrive to obtain.

And this is the matter we ſhall now endeavour circumſtantially to elucidate, and prove to demonſtration.

In this deſign we have two queſtions to anſwer.

The firſt, What is Virtue?

The ſecond, Whence does it acquire its pre-eminent value?

Virtue

Virtue does not conſiſt in particular good actions. Neither temperance, nor chaſtity, nor juſtice, nor equity, nor beneficence, give us the idea of what virtue is, and what it implies. Theſe are no more than the ſeveral ways in which it is diſplayed, the effects of its operation. It is the foundation, the ſource of theſe and all other good actions. That the eye ſees without obſtruction, that the ear without difficulty hears, that every natural ſenſe imbibes the impreſſion of outward things, that every limb and member of the body performs its functions with regularity and eaſe, is not what is meant by the eſſential of health: they are only the various effects and indications of it. Health conſiſts in the juſt and proper relation of all the parts, all the veſſels and juices of our whole body with one another, and in the undebilitated freedom of action of the vital powers which pervade, and cheriſh, and ſet them all in motion.

Virtue,

Virtue, in like manner, does not conſiſt in particular good diſpoſitions. That we find a pleaſure in beneficence; that we intenſely reflect on ſerious ſubjects; that we heartily promote peace and concord; that we are more diſpoſed to think well than ill of our fellow-creatures: theſe are all good diſpoſitions, in which the virtuous perſon cannot be deficient; but none of theſe diſpoſitions alone, nor even ſeveral of them together, render us truly virtuous, or form the diſtinction, the eſſential of true virtue.

No; virtue is an aggregate, an indiviſible whole. It is not ſo much action, as principle of action; not ſo much ſentiment, as principle of ſentiment. It impels us to thoſe good actions, and inſpires us with theſe good ſentiments. Animated and governed by it, we will and do what is good; we incline to it with energy and deciſion, and practiſe it heartily and firmly. It is, in effect, the frame of our ſpirit, the direction

rection and application of our faculties, which prompts us conſtantly to think, to be inclined, and to act, in conformity to truth, to regularity, and to the will of God. It conſiſts in a general, prevalent, effective deſire after whatever is true, and right, and good, proportionate to our nature and our relative ſituations, and the nature and relations of other things, in the conſtant readineſs to do or not to do, to ſuffer or to bear, to be and to have, what God will have us to do or not to do, to bear or to ſuffer, to be and to have, or not to be and not to have. It conſiſts in the truth of our reflections, feelings, deſires, our words and works, in the harmony of every part of our inward and outward conduct, among themſelves, and with the law of God. It is therefore preciſely what we commonly term the love and practice of goodneſs, a ready and unlimited obedience towards God and his commandments, or univerſal righteouſneſs. It is the health

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and the true life of the ſoul, the ſtate of our ſpirit, when it is and does what it ought to be and to do, according to its proper ordination; the force which conſtantly impels us to all that is fair and good, and generous and uſeful, what is agreeable to God, and promotes the perfection and happineſs of man,—repleniſhes us with good-will to all men, and induces us to live and act more for others than for ourſelves, and to employ whatever we are and have in the moſt uſeful manner.

Now, ſuch a virtue, we may repeat it, is of more value than all the other goods, the value whereof we have hitherto conſidered and ſettled in ſeveral diſcourſes; of more value than riches, than honour, than the pleaſures of the ſenſes, more than all the advantages and pleaſures of the ſpirit, as they are at variance with virtue, or independent thereon. The following remarks will

will ſet this in its proper light, and render it evident.

Firſt, Virtue is purely, and without all limitation, good; purely, and without all limitation or exception, uſeful and honourable. This we cannot pronounce of any other good, though in itſelf, and under certain conditions, never ſo eſtimable. Riches may be a ſnare to us, and honours a burden: ſenſible pleaſures may become a ſource of trouble and pain; they all may lead us into ſin and vice, and thereby plunge us into miſery. Even the diſtinctions of the mind, knowledge and ſcience, wit and penetration, and the ſublimer pleaſures they produce, may be miſapplied in a thouſand ways, and in a thouſand ways become hurtful and deſtructive to ourſelves and others. Neither outward wealth nor faculties of mind can ſhield the ignorant and vicious from folly and miſery. Virtue alone can never be miſapplied, can never be

be criminal: for a man cannot be too virtuous; cannot be too faithful, too juſt, or think and act too well; nor enjoy the pleaſures of virtue too often and too conſtantly, nor by that enjoyment grow negligent of his duties. No one virtue is at variance with any other; none is an impediment to the practice of another; none leſſens our deſire or weakens our faculties for another. Properly there is but one virtue (as I have already obſerved), and that is, the predominant, unchangeable readineſs to do that which is lawful and right, and is the beſt in every caſe, whatever is in conformity with nature, with the will of God, with our relationſhip to him and other things. And wherever the readineſs and aptitude is, there no contention, no contradiction with itſelf, can find place, no duty to be obſerved to the diſadvantage or neglect of another, no kind of moral good to be ſought and exhibited at the expence of another.

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The value of virtue is likewiſe, in the ſecond place, far more unchangeable than the value of all other goods and advantages. The value of riches will be regulated according to our wants, and the wants of the ſociety in which we live. We may ſuppoſe caſes, where they are totally uſeleſs, and become a mere burden to us. The value of honour changes according to the opinions, the uſages, and the political eſtabliſhments of mankind; it riſes and falls, and becomes in itſelf more or leſs reſpectable, according as the outward tokens of general eſtimation are more rare or more numerous, are diſtributed with diſcreet ſelection, or indiſcriminately conferred: and out of ſocial life, in the ſilence of retirement, they almoſt ceaſe to be diſtinctions. The value of pleaſure is not more fixed and permanent: how dependent is it on events, on derived and received opinions, and tacit agreements and ſecret convention! how much on the formation of our body, the

diſpoſition of our nerves, the ſtate of our health, our age, and other circumſtances! how various and how different the aſpects under which it appears in different times and different places! how often is it inſipid, how often irkſome, how often does it ceaſe from being pleaſure, and how frequently it changes into pain! Even the advantages of the mind, underſtanding, erudition, knowledge, and art, are liable to numberleſs alterations. Their value changes according to the prevailing taſte; as this or the other kind of ſcience or mental exertions are more or leſs eſteemed, admired, and preferred.

The value of virtue alone is always immutable; at all times, among all nations, in all circumſtances, amidſt the manifold changes and chances of life, alone unchangeable. Indeed, not that which we peculiarly call virtue, which may be differently eſtimated in different times and places,

places, may be ſometimes of greater and ſometimes of ſmaller worth. But the way of thinking and acting, the diſpoſition of mind, the character, the ſtate of a rational being, which we term virtue, and which alone deſerves that name, are and remain for ever the ſame, always and every where retain their value. Truth, order, goodneſs, integrity, can never ceaſe from being truth, order, goodneſs, and integrity, though we live in this place or in that, are connected with theſe or with other men, in ſolitude or in ſociety, in proſperity or in adverſity, in health or in ſickneſs. Even after our terreſtrial life, they are and remain exactly what they were in themſelves. Riches, honour, and pleaſure, are totally loſt to us in death. We cannot even reſcue all mental pleaſures from deſtruction. Who knows how much or how little of our knowledge, our ſcience, or our art, and of the pleaſures that attend them, we ſhall be able to take with us into the other world? All

that we now reckon for ſuch we certainly ſhall not retain.—But nothing, Sirs, nothing can attack our virtue; nothing diminiſh its value. The regularity that has once got the ſway of our ſoul, the good qualities it has once acquired, its love towards all that is true and good, its love to God and man, remain with it after the death of the body, as certainly as it retains them till that death arrive. They will be of exactly the ſame value in the future ſtate as in the preſent,—will be then preciſely as perfect, as bleſſed, and render the ſoul far more perfect and more bleſſed, than they could do here.

The value of virtue is, in the third place, much more univerſal and independent on ſtation and connection than that of all other, and particularly of outward things; or, it is more univerſally uſeful than all others, and therefore poſſeſſes a greater worth than they. Riches would utterly ceaſe to be riches, if all men lived

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in abundance. Honour would loſe much of its value, at leaſt in the preſent ſtate of things, if it gave us no precedence over others; if every man could make the ſame pretenſions to it, and produce his authentic claims. Many kinds of pleaſure muſt loſe their title to that name, if all men could partake in the enjoyment of them; many others would be far leſs prized and ſought after, if they were not, in ſome degree, the property of certain ſtates and conditions of men. Society in general could not ſubſiſt, if the enjoyment of all the pleaſures of the ſenſes, even the moſt innocent of them, and all the means and opportunities of it, were alike free to every man. Even as little could human ſociety ſubſiſt, if all the members of it purſued only mental pleaſures, if they were only to exerciſe themſelves in ſcientific attainments, or in diverting and amuſing knowledge; and a great proportion of the value of theſe things would preſently be reduced to nothing, if

every man poſſeſſed them, and every man in the ſame degree.

Quite otherwiſe is the caſe with virtue. That is, and remains, among all claſſes and conditions of men, the ſame. It accommodates itſelf to every rank, to every calling, and to every occupation of life. It elevates every rank, dignifies every calling, and alleviates every occupation of life. It adapts itſelf to both high and low, to the rich and the poor, to the learned and the unlearned, to every age, to both ſexes, to all ſocieties. It is profitable and honourable to all. It looſens no band of ſocial life; but ties them all cloſer together. No man loſes any thing by it, if another be virtuous likewiſe: but if all were virtuous, all would profit, infinitely profit thereby. Neither can virtue be too prevalent or too common, or have too much influence on the diſpoſitions and conduct of mankind. The more virtue, the leſs diſcord

cord and miſery! the more virtue, the more peace and felicity!

Virtue has, fourthly, a ſuper-eminent value, by the excellent effects it produces in us; by the extraordinary influence it has on our perfection and happineſs. It makes us much better, much more uſeful to our fellow-creatures, much fitter for a ſuperior life, much more cloſely allied to God, than any other privilege or advantage we poſſeſs.

Virtue renders us much better. Riches, honour, ſenſible and ſpiritual pleaſures, may ameliorate our outward condition, procure us agreeable ſenſations; may furniſh us with incitements, means, opportunity for acquiring ſound knowledge, for the practice of good works, and for promoting our moral amendment. Virtue is the thing performed by all theſe means, the end and aim to which they all con-

duce; it brings this amendment to effect, and makes us actually as perfect as our nature allows. Or, what is perfection but the harmony and full conſent of all the parts to one ultimate end and aim, the beſt ſtate to which any thing is capable of being brought? And is not virtue this? Does not the moſt beautiful order and harmony prevail in the ſoul of the virtuous man? Are not all his deſires and powers directed to what is true and good? Is he not continually aiming at the ſelf-ſame mark? Has he not the ſame unalterable view in all he thinks, and wills, and does?

Virtue makes us far more generally uſeful than the poſſeſſion of any other prerogative. Riches, honour, ſcience, and knowledge, are no more than means of diverſified beneficence; means of becoming uſeful to our fellow-creatures in a high degree. But, ſo long as virtue does not accompany and guide us in the applica-

tion of theſe means, ſo long ſhall we comparatively perform but little by them; we ſhall be often weary of employing them to that end; ſhall frequently do harm by them inſtead of good. It is virtue that teaches us rightly to uſe all theſe advantages, to employ them in the beſt and nobleſt manner. Riches, honour, art, and ſcience, are commonly hurtful without virtue; are very often the food and implements of the moſt deſtructive paſſions. But virtue, without riches, without honour, without art and ſcience, is and remains ſtill uſeful; ſtill performs much good, much pure and unalloyed good. Even the pooreſt, the loweſt, the moſt unlearned man, if he has but virtue, may perform unnumbered acts of goodneſs, according to the extent of the ſphere in which he moves. How much may he do by advice, by deed, by conſolation, and by example! And how much more extenſively, how much more powerfully, may he operate,

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if he be adorned and embelliſhed by thoſe advantages, and ſtill retain his virtue!

Virtue likewiſe renders us more happy than any thing elſe can do. Riches and honour, indeed, procure us advantage; ſenſible and mental pleaſure afford us pleaſing ſenſations. But neither one nor the other can we enjoy ſo frequently, and but ſeldom in ſo high a degree, as we could deſire. Both the one and the other may become uſeleſs and prejudicial to us in a greater or leſs degree; may turn more to our diſquiet than to our joy. Virtue alone can never become burdenſome, or uſeleſs, or unneceſſary to us. It bleſſes us for ever; ſolaces, comforts, and rejoices us for ever; ever gives us the beſt counſel; ever guides us the ſureſt way; ever brings us nearer to our aim. Where truth and order is, there is ſerenity and ſatisfaction: where pure and generous love prevails, there happineſs has fixt her throne. The man who feels

feels and maintains his intrinſic dignity, can generally ſee himſelf ſtripped of all outward appendages, without becoming unhappy: the man whoſe will is in perfect conſonance with the will of God, has and can do what he will, ſince he wills and does nothing but what God calls him to will and to do!

For the very ſame reaſon, virtue renders us fitter for a better and a higher life, than all other poſſeſſions; nay, that alone can render us capable of it. It paſſes for as much in heaven as it does upon earth, and much more. We are there as little liable to be deprived of it, as here. It is there the dignity and the life of our ſpirit, as well as here. Nay, there it is all in all; the moſt complete compenſation for all the advantages we loſe by death, the foundation of all greater and nobler activity, of all higher honour and power, the band of union between the inhabitants of the better world.

world. It is that which all the wiſe and good ſubjects of God, in his whole immeaſurable kingdom, have in common with each other; what indiſſolubly binds them together, and intimately connects them with him, their Creator and Father.

Nay, virtue gives us a far greater reſemblance to God than any advantage beſide. What we call riches, is poverty with God. Our exaltation and power is the weakneſs and imbecillity of an infant in his eyes. Our very knowledge and erudition is, for the moſt part, error and obſcurity in his purer light. By ſuch advantages we acquire no likeneſs to him, or only in an infinitely remote degree. But, to will what God wills; to love truth and order, as God loves them; to wiſh well and to do good to all mankind, as he is benevolent and beneficent; to ſeek and find our ſatisfaction in the beſt employment of our faculties and the moſt uſeful activity, as God finds his

his therein: by theſe means we continually are approaching nearer to God—very near—are continually becoming more like him, and ever fitter for fellowſhip with him. And it is virtue that exalts us to this ſimilitude, and virtue alone.

Who then can ſtill entertain a doubt, that it is the greateſt and moſt exalted of all advantages, of all the kinds of property we can poſſeſs, the beſt and the moſt deſirable,—that it is of more value than riches and honours, than ſtation or power, than pleaſure, erudition, and ſcience—more than tranſient, quickly riſing and quickly evaporating, devotion—more than health and life; virtue, which is the health of the ſoul, and the life of the ſpirit?

It is likewiſe more valuable with God, the centre of all virtue, than all things elſe can be. It is the faireſt lineament of his likeneſs in man; the ſole means whereby

by he can reſemble him; the only privilege which God, by his meſſengers, hath honoured with his expreſs and ſupreme regard; the rule by which he will hereafter confer his glorious rewards on man. If unaccompanied by virtue, he rejects the moſt coſtly offerings, the moſt ſolemn devotions, the moſt auſtere obſervances. With it, he favourably accepts every good wiſh of the heart, every readineſs of the will, every earneſt endeavour.—It was virtue that exalted an Abraham to be his peculiar friend: it was ſhe that affixed the mark of the offspring of God on all the wiſe and good of every age and clime. It was ſhe,—this daughter of heaven—that impreſſed our Jeſus with the ſtamp of the only-begotten, and the favourite of the Father, as the ſublimeſt pattern of all human perfection, rendered him capable of the cloſeſt and moſt intimate communion with God, and exalted him to be Lord over all!

And

And canſt thou refuſe her thy eſteem, O man! thy reverence, O chriſtian! who haſt yet any ſentiment of what is venerable and excellent! No; beware of ſtifling this ſentiment of truth in thy heart! Let virtue be the object of thy eſteem and reverence, more than any thing that has hitherto demanded them of thee. In honouring virtue, thou honoureſt God. Eſteem and revere her, then, wherever thou findeſt her, under whatever aſpect, in whatever garb, ſhe appears, in what language ſoever ſhe ſpeaks to thee, by what actions ſoever ſhe makes herſelf known! Let not your love of her be ſhewn only in general, but in every particular perſon whom ſhe animates and governs. Virtue, in the general, is no more than an idea, a repreſentation of our mind: ſhe actually exiſts only in particular beings. In theſe we muſt eſteem and revere her. He that deſpiſes any poor and low but virtuous man, deſpiſes virtue herſelf.

ſelf. And, if thou deſpiſeſt virtue, O man! thou deſpiſeſt all that is beautiful, and great, and venerable; thou deſpiſeſt God, the fountain of all perfection.

But doſt thou eſteem her as ſhe deſerves? Oh then heſitate not a moment, what thou haſt to do, which thou haſt to chuſe, when thou haſt to determine between her and riches, between her and the honour of men, between her and ſenſible or mental pleaſures. Rather let them all be loſt to thee, than forſake or violate her. Doſt thou ſtill refuſe to ſacrifice all that militates with her? Doſt thou ſtill make anxious efforts to loſe nothing on either hand? Does any inconſiderable loſs, thou ſuffereſt for her ſake, ſtill give thee pain? Oh then, ſay not that thou art virtuous!

No; Wilt thou be ſo? Be ſo without reſerve. Think not to put aſunder what God

God and the nature of things have joined in the cloſeſt and moſt indiſſoluble bands. Here at leaſt we may ſay with propriety, All or nothing! No compoſition can be made in this matter!—So long as thou endeavoureſt to aſſimilate and connect virtue with vice—the two moſt contradictory and incompatible things in nature—with one another, thou art doubly wretched. Thou enjoyeſt not the happineſs of virtue, and thou only in part enjoyeſt the fleeting and tranſient pleaſures of vice, not with a tranquil mind, not without ſecret anguiſh and remorſe. Wouldſt thou be happy, and continually be adding to thy happineſs? Oh, then, determine totally, and firmly, and irrevocably, for Virtue! Let her inform and animate thy ſoul, convert thee, as it were, into a new creature; let her be thy guide and conductreſs in all times and in all places; the moving ſpirit of thy whole behaviour! Then wilt thou ſee

and experience how great, how unſpeakably great, her value is; what dignity and ſtrength ſhe imparts to man, what ſerenity and happineſs ſhe procures him; and then wilt thou ſecure to thyſelf the poſſeſſion of her for ever and ever!

ESTI-

ESTIMATE XIII.

THE
SUPERIOR VALUE
OF
CHRISTIAN VIRTUE.

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.

2 Pet. i. 3.

THE SUPERIOR VALUE OF CHRISTIAN VIRTUE.

VIRTUE has, and ever retains, a certain value, be it as defective and imperfect as it may, in whatever perſon it is exhibited, and in whatever manner it is diſplayed. Truth will ever be truth, and order be always order: and he that thinks and acts conſiſtently with his relationſhip to God and his connection with all within his ſphere, thinks and acts conſiſtently with truth and the order of things; and this, in all times and places, muſt be right and good. Indeed, the principles on which a man performs what is right and good,

and the views wherein he does ſo, may weaken and obſcure the value of theſe actions, the value of virtue; but even this cannot wholly deſtroy it. The gold that is not purified from its droſs, does not therefore ceaſe to be gold. We ſhould dread, then, to incur the juſt imputation of committing an inſult upon virtue, were we to pronounce, with ſome antient chriſtian teachers, all the virtues of the heathens, or ſuch as were not chriſtians, to be ſplendid ſins. Many of their renowned atchievements may well have been ſo; as, at preſent, ſo many ſeemingly good—very good—actions of chriſtians are in reality nothing leſs than good. But, we are not, on that account, to condemn them all, and declare all the really great, and noble, and public-ſpirited actions they performed, to be merely the fruit of the meaneſt ſelf-intereſt, and the baſeſt paſſions. No man is altogether inſenſible to truth, or totally incapable of thinking and acting in conformity

formity to it; and whoever can do ſo, can be alſo more or leſs virtuous, and act accordingly. The ſtronger and more prevalent this ſenſibility is, the more univerſal and active will virtue be. If, then, ſenſibility be not excluſively the peculiar property of any nation, or of any man, ſo neither can virtue be.

But it is with chriſtian virtue as with a hundred other things. Mankind are prone to extol ſome one thing of undoubted excellence, and then to think they cannot do better than to vilify not only what is at variance, but likewiſe whatever has moſt reſemblance and moſt affinity with it, what comes the neareſt to it, in ſuch a manner as to allow it no value at all. So we often hear one virtue extolled at the expence of another; and ſo, in particular, the chriſtian virtue at the expence of the not-chriſtian. But may not, then, two things be good or excellent, and yet one be bet-

ter and more excellent than the other? Let the not-chriſtian virtue enjoy all the value it has; reſpect goodneſs of every kind, and reſpect goodneſs wherever you find it; let juſtice be done to every man, whether he be a chriſtian or not. Chriſtian virtue can loſe nothing thereby; ſhe ever remains what ſhe is, and ever retains a great ſuperiority over every other kind of virtue. Of this my preſent diſcourſe ſhall give you complete conviction.

We have already inveſtigated the value of ſeveral things that have an influence on human happineſs; the value of riches, of honours, of ſenſible and ſpiritual pleaſures, of piety, of ſenſibility, and virtue; we have ſhewn you that virtue far excels all the former: we propoſe to-day to endeavour at convincing you of the ſuperiority or the excellency of the value of chriſtian virtue, when compared with all other virtue, and thereby increaſe your reverence for it.

Theſe

Theſe reflections will convince us how true that is which the apoſtle Peter affirms: God hath imparted to us chriſtians, by the knowledge of Jeſus Chriſt, or by the chriſtian religion, as much of his godly power as we had need of for leading a pious and a virtuous life. That is: by the chriſtian doctrine, and its divine influence upon us, the leading of a holy life is rendered much eaſier to us, and we may advance farther in virtue and piety, than we could do otherwiſe. And this we will take upon us circumſtantially to explain and demonſtrate.

You know what it is we underſtand by virtue in general. We mean the diſpoſition of our mind, the direction and adaptation of its faculties in ſuch a manner as that we conſtantly think, will, and act, conſiſtently with truth, order, and the will of God; the univerſal, prevalent, operative inclination to every thing that is true, and right, and good, in conformity to our nature

ture and connections, and the nature and relations of other things; the conſtant readineſs to do or not to do, to ſuffer or to bear, to be and to have, or not to be and not to have, what God wills us to do, or not to do, to bear or ſuffer, be and have, or not to be and not to have; the truth and harmony of all the parts of our inward and outward conduct between themſelves and with the law of God. In this, undoubtedly, conſiſts the eſſence of all virtue.

Now, if it be the doctrines of chriſtianity which give this direction and adaptation to our mind and its faculties; if it be the doctrines of chriſtianity that produce in us theſe predominant diſpoſitions to truth and order, to whatever is right and good, and in every caſe the beſt; if it be the doctrines of chriſtianity which ſo abſolutely ſubdue our inclinations to the will of God; if it be gratitude for the benefits which God hath done us by his ſon Jeſus, and for the hopes

hopes to which he hath advanced us; if it be an intimate and hearty love to God, and love to our Lord and Saviour, which excites us to ſuch a diſpoſition, and to ſuch a conduct, which produces in us ſo beautiful a harmony between all our thoughts, inclinations, propenſities, and actions; if it be the precepts and example of Jeſus which conduct and lead us to it; if it be his ſpirit, his mind, which lives and governs in us, and are diſplayed by us: then is our virtue chriſtian virtue; it ſubſiſts in us by chriſtianity; it is nouriſhed and ſtrengthened in us by chriſtianity; it is framed upon the doctrines and commands of chriſtianity; it is nothing elſe but vital, effective, and practical chriſtianity.

Now, to ſuch a chriſtian virtue we aſcribe a ſuperior value; and this it actually poſſeſſes, whether we conſider it in regard to its ſources, or its ſtandard, or its motives, or its extent, or its views. In all theſe

theſe particulars it is purer, greater, firmer, more active, more beneficial, more bleſſed, than it would be without the help of chriſtianity; in all theſe particulars it therefore excels every other virtue which is deſtitute of this help. Not to dwell now upon the ſeveral compariſons neceſſary for the demonſtration of this, we ſhall only examine what chriſtian virtue more peculiarly is, and then leave you to draw your own concluſions of its excellency.

The ſources, then, from whence it ſprings are the pureſt; the grounds on which it reſts are the firmeſt, and the moſt adapted to the nature of man. It is the fruit of an altered and ameliorated heart; a heart, as it were, new-formed by the doctrines of chriſtianity: or, if it have taken early poſſeſſion of it, before vice can have ſtruck its roots therein, then is it the frame and condition of a ſpirit impregnated with theſe doctrines, and formed upon them; then their

their roots lie deep; take faſt hold; extend themſelves through all the faculties and all the conduct of the man; and interweave, inſinuate, and aſſimilate themſelves with his whole nature. Chriſtian virtue is not an accidental, tranſient effect of particular thoughts and emotions, but the effect and reſult of the whole thinking and ſenſitive ſyſtem. Its force and duration is not dependent on this or that particular idea, but on an intire indiviſible conſequence of the grandeſt and moſt exalted truths. It grounds itſelf on all that chriſtianity tells us of God, his attributes, his providence, his conduct towards us, and particularly of his love and clemency to weak, and ſinful, and guilty creatures; on all that it diſcovers to us of our nature, our origin, our vocation, the general judgement, and the future remuneration; on all it teaches us concerning Jeſus, of his great buſineſs upon earth, of his aſſiſtance to mankind, of his holy life and beneficial

death, of his connection with us, of his dominion over us, of his love towards us, and of his ſpirit in us. When theſe doctrines preſent themſelves to a man, as undeniable godly truths; when he feels their truth, their certainty, their importance, feels how intimately they are connected with his preſent and future happineſs; when they ſtream their radiant light upon his mind, and operate in their whole force upon his heart; when he is deeply affected by the love of God and of his ſon Jeſus; when he is filled with ſincere remorſe at the ſight of his ſins; when his gratitude is awakened, and his love inflamed; when he has learnt to uſe and enjoy the promiſed aſſiſtance from on high; when he perceives and feels that all this is granted him by the pure bounty of God, how wretched he ſhould be, and how miſerable and deplorable he ſhould continue, without it; how happy he is rendered by it, and how much more he may and ſhall be ſo; when he feels

that he has the happineſs to be a chriſtian, called to a bleſſed immortality, conſtantly ſtrives to render himſelf more capable and worthy of this happineſs, to draw nigher to his God and his Saviour, and all theſe diſpoſitions and feelings are predominant in him: then he obtains, as it were, a new ſpirit and a new heart, becomes a new creature,—is virtuous, and chriſtianly virtuous. And who ſees not how pure, how rich, how inexhauſtible, this ſource of virtue muſt be in him? on what ſolid foundation the edifice of ſuch a virtue reſts! how differently muſt all theſe doctrines, and the bleſſed alteration effected by them in his whole frame, act on him! how much more life and power to goodneſs muſt they impart to him, than the bare repreſentation, however juſt and true, of the fitneſs or unfitneſs of things, of their natural relationſhips, ends, and powers! how much more adapted are they to the nature and capacities of man, and indeed to all particular

cular men, however different their proportion of comprehenſion and their ſenſibility may be!

The rule of chriſtian virtue—and this is its ſecond advantage—the rule of chriſtian virtue is more fixed, more ſure, more infallible, and more uſeful than any other. God hath, indeed, inſcribed all his laws upon our hearts; but how much have prejudices, errors, the luſts, and the paſſions, obſcured this heavenly writing, with the generality of men! with how many are they thus rendered illegible! with how many are they totally effaced!—God hath indeed made us all capable of a lively ſentiment, a quick and certain judgement of what is good and bad, and right and wrong: but how ſeldom is this faculty ſo unfolded and improved, how ſeldom is this judgement ſo exerciſed and ſharpened, as to be a ſafe and certain guide to us in all events! How often, on the contrary, is

is this ſentiment ſtifled by the multitude of oppoſite practices, cuſtoms, and examples, and this judgement perverted by the artifices of ſelf-love! How often, therefore, muſt even the upright man, the friend of virtue, who has no other guide than theſe, be deficient in neceſſary certainty and reſolution! how often, where his path divides into two, muſt he be liable to take the wrong!

A miſtake, which the friend of chriſtian virtue far leſs frequently falls into, which he may totally avoid, if he adheres to the directions given him. His path is pointed out before him: he finds in every part of it the footſteps of his leader and precurſor, Jeſus. Here are the expreſs precepts and commands of God, his Lawgiver, and his Father. This is the way thou ſhalt go; thou ſhalt not turn aſide to the right hand or to the left! There is the example of Jeſus, our captain and lord. As he was

diſpoſed, ſo muſt thou, his diſciple and follower, be diſpoſed; as he walked, ſo muſt thou alſo walk. How can I ſtand heſitating there, how fall into error, how come ſhort of my mark? As a chriſtian, I believe in God, and believe in Jeſus; I confidently truſt myſelf to God, my heavenly Father, and to his Son, my Saviour and Lord;—I know that God loves me; I know that Jeſus loves me; I know that my Creator and my Redeemer would nothing more than my happineſs,—I therefore do, what God bids me do; abſtain from what he bids me avoid; endure what he bids me to undergo;—follow as Jeſus leads, tread confidently in his footſteps, form myſelf upon his ſpirit, think and act as he thought and acted: frequently aſk myſelf, what would he have done, or not have done, in my circumſtances and condition?—And while I do thus, how can I—I repeat my interrogation—how can I then ſtand hefitating, how go aſtray, how wander from my mark?

mark? My leader is infallible; his precepts are godly truth. My path is luminous; it ſhews itſelf diſtinctly from all by-paths and devious ways; it does not wind its courſe in gloomy labyrinths; it leads ſtrait forward to the mark; conſtantly grows ſmoother and plainer, the nearer it brings me to it.—With what comfortable aſſurance, then, may I walk therein! how ſecurely purſue my courſe! to what a certainty and firmneſs will it bring me in the practice of virtue!

The ſphere of chriſtian virtue is likewiſe far more wide, its activity greater than the ſphere and activity of any other virtue. Chriſtianity, and Chriſtianity alone, teaches us to conſider all things, the ſmall as well as the great, the ſeemingly inſignificant as well as the more important, ſo much in their dependance upon God; connects all ſo cloſely with his will; unites our whole preſent life, with all its affairs, its pleaſures,

and its purpoſes, ſo intimately and indiſſolubly with our future exalted ſtate; calls us to look ſo ſtedfaſtly at God and Jeſus, that, with the man that is totally animated by the ſpirit of chriſtianity, all is virtue,—all, even his moſt inconſiderable actions, are the fruits and productions of virtue. "Whether, therefore," as it is written, "he eateth or drinketh, or whatſoever he doth, he doth all to the glory of God." "Whatſoever he doth in word or deed, he doth all in the name of the Lord Jeſus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." To the chriſtian nothing is proportionately indifferent, nothing unimportant: the ſpirit which lives and governs in him, ennobles all he thinks and does. His meditations on God, his joyfulneſs in him, his eager deſires to pleaſe him, his proſpects in futurity, give life, and dignity, and conſequence, to every thing he meets with, and every thing he is employed in. He conſiders, judges, does, enjoys, and endures all things

things in the light of godly truth—all things as a chriſtian. Every buſineſs of his calling is to him a commiſſion from God; every inſurmountable difficulty he meets with in it, is a prohibition of God; every favourable circumſtance, the aſſiſtance and the bleſſing of God; every pleaſure, and every ſucceſs, a benefaction of God; every misfortune, a chaſtiſement of his love; every good and every wicked man, an inſtrument in his hand. His whole life, therefore, is one continued obedience, a conſtant reſignation to the will of heaven, and a filial reverence of the good pleaſure of God. His virtue, then, comprehends and embraces all things, combines all with each other and with God; limits him to no place, to no time, to no ſtation; and the ſphere of his activity is as large as the ſphere of his thoughts, his ſenſations, his affairs, his pleaſures, the combinations of his joys and his ſorrows!

And no wonder, Sirs, that the virtue of the chriſtian comprehends ſo much, and operates ſo far. The incitements, the motives he has thereto as a chriſtian, are far more various and forcible than any others. They affect his heart while they employ his mind. They ſubdue all his deſires, and captivate his ſenſibility, till they have convinced his reaſon. Chriſtianity is ordained for all mankind, and ſtill more for the man of ſenſibility than for the man of cold abſtracted reflection. What the philoſophers call truth, order, and the fitneſs of things, is here termed the command of God, our Creator and Lawgiver; the expreſs will of our ſupreme Benefactor; the precept, admonition, and example of a Saviour and Redeemer, who died out of love to us; it is the only means of pleaſing this indulgent God, of delighting this generous Redeemer, and of ſharing in his power and glory; it is the way that leads to a bleſſed immortality, to the poſſeſſion of

of the moſt exalted prerogatives, to the fruition of the pureſt joys in a better world. Here all the ſprings of action in man are ſet in motion, whatever uſually incites him to the uſe of his faculties, and renders him ſteady in the exertions of them: reverence, gratitude, love, reſignation, joy, hope; deſire of applauſe, thirſt after pleaſure, after perfection, after happineſs. And what effects muſt this produce in the human heart! And what a mighty force muſt their united powers afford for combating againſt error, againſt the authority of cuſtom, and the influence of bad example!

How can I forbear to love God, the God who loved me ſo much, ſo inexpreſſibly, as to ordain Jeſus to be my Saviour; who, through him, has exalted me to the dignity of being his ſon, and called me to ſupreme felicity? And how can I love him, this God, unleſs I keep all his com-

mandments, and conform my whole will to his?—How can I revere Jeſus, the ſon of his love, who humbled himſelf ſo far for mankind, did and ſuffered for them ſo much, imparted to them ſo much illumination, ſo much comfort, freedom, hope, and happineſs? how admire him who died upon the croſs, and thereby delivered me from the dread of death? how connect myſelf moſt intimately with him? how honour him as my Lord and King, unleſs I give myſelf wholly to him, unleſs I be ready to do and to ſuffer, to hazard and to ſacrifice every thing for him who ſurrendered and ſacrificed ſo much for me, who even laid down his life for my ſake?——How can I expect his laſt advent to judgement with ſatisfaction to myſelf, unleſs I conſtantly am preparing myſelf for it by a holy conduct and godly means? how tranſport myſelf in ſpirit into the abode of the bleſſed, which he hath prepared and opened for me, and here not think and live as that

higher

higher ſtate requires?—And if I love God, if I love Jeſus; if I have an inſight into futurity; if I feel how much, how infinitely much, I owe to God and to his ſon Jeſus; how bleſſed I am already in the enjoyment of theſe benefits, and how much more bleſſed I ſhall hereafter be; what duty will then be too hard for me; what ſacrifice, that God ſhall require of me, too coſtly; what ſin will not be hateful to me; what opportunity for doing good, and for becoming uſeful to my brethren, like Jeſus, will not be right welcome to me? Certainly he that thinketh thus—and thus muſt the chriſtian think, who is a chriſtian in deed and in truth—cannot be wanting in incitements, in deſire, in ability to do good; hath more and ſtronger motives to be virtuous, and conſtantly to improve in virtue, than any other man who has not the happineſs to be a chriſtian.

And

And how much more noble and grand are, laſtly, the views of chriſtian virtue! how much ſuperior and more excellent the mark at which it aims! All virtue has in view the promoting of what is true, and beautiful, and good; all virtue aims at order, at perfection, at happineſs; but not as chriſtian virtue does. The greater and juſter the knowledge is which the chriſtian has of God, of Jeſus, of the chief end of man, and of futurity, ſo much the nobler muſt be his ſentiments, ſo much more comprehenſive his views, ſo much more exalted the purpoſe he purſues.—The whole human race is but one large family to him, and that the family of God, his heavenly Father; a family which he embraces with his benevolence, and viſits with his love; and his affectionate activity is circumſcribed by no falſe patriotiſm, is weakened by no prejudices of rank or nation. Jeſus is to him, Jeſus that is highly exalted over all, is to him the Lord and King of men; truth and virtue, freedom

and

and happineſs, are the privileges and diſtinctions of his kingdom; and every word, every deed, every ſacrifice, every ſuffering whereby the chriſtian can bring one man from error to truth, from vice to virtue, from bondage into freedom, whereby he can amend, conſole, or rejoice him, is to him an enlargement and confirmation of the glorious kingdom of Jeſus, an actual participation in his great work upon earth.—To him this life is the porch or veſtibule of the future, the preparation to it: and all that he does and operates here, and occaſions others to do and effect; all the harm that he here prevents; all the good he here performs; all the ſeed he ſows in this earthly ſoil; all the germs he brings to fruit; are to him cauſes that infinitely extend in effects. This is the ſeed-time, of which he expects hereafter to reap a harveſt of a thouſand-fold. What proſpects! What extenſive, what comprehenſive views does the virtue of the chriſtian open before

fore him! He promotes the gracious purpoſes of God with regard to man, and labours in fellowſhip with him, his heavenly Father, for the benefit of his children; eſpouſes the cauſe of truth, of integrity, of freedom, the cauſe of God, according to the utmoſt of his power; proſecutes the work that Jeſus began on earth, and enlarges the limits of his kingdom; aſſiſts mankind, his brethren, in their progreſs towards heaven; and is uſeful to them, not only here, not only long after his death, but even to eternity. How much muſt ſuch proſpects as theſe ennoble all his virtuous endeavours and actions! Can the imagination frame any loftier, any more extenſive purpoſes than theſe?

And will they ever allow him to be weary or diſheartened in his endeavours to amend himſelf and others? Will they ever allow him to ſet bounds to his wiſdom, his goodneſs, and his general utility; ever to think

think that he has done too much, or even enough? No; his aim is perfection, chriſtian perfection, a conſtant endeavour at a nearer reſemblance to Jeſus, a conſtantly nearer approximation to God. Nothing ſhort of this can ſatisfy him. The ſtandard by which he meaſures the value or the magnitude of his virtue, is not the judgement of the world, but the judgement of heaven; not what he is and does, but what he can do, and what he may be. Even when he has laboured long at his improvement, has already made great advances, already done much, brought much about, and ſuffered much, he ſtill exclaims, with the apoſtle, "Not that I "have already attained or am already per-"fect." No; I forget thoſe things that are behind, I ſcarcely make account of what I have already done and performed, while ſo much remains for me to do; I preſs forward, after the higher degrees of perfection I have not yet attained, after the prize

prize of the mark of righteouſneſs and integrity I have then to expect when I ſurmount all things, and perſevere unto the end.

Yes, this is thy generous diſpoſition, this thy peculiar and thy ſolemn language, thou beſt and ſureſt guide of man, O chriſtian virtue!—Bleſſed be thy arrival upon earth! and bleſſed the Lord who brought thee amongſt men, and laid the foundations of thy empire in their hearts! Gentle is thy ſway, and obedience to thee is liberty and peace. Thou giveſt ſtrength to the weary, and power to the impotent. Thou lifteſt up the poor out of the mire; thou exalteſt the humble and meek. Thou bleſſeſt him with the ſentiment of his preſent and future dignity. Thou art divine wiſdom to the unlearned as well as to the learned. Thou giveſt reſolution to the irreſolute; inſpireſt the dead with life, and the timid with the courage of heroes.

The

The miſerable is indebted to thee for his ſweeteſt comfort, the deſpiſed good man for the inward repoſe of his ſpirit, the victim of perſecution for the conſciouſneſs of his righteouſneſs and fidelity, the ſufferer for his ſilent perſevering courage, and the dying man for his joyful hopes. Thou haſt performed numberleſs noble deeds, and daily performeſt numberleſs more, which never come to the knowledge of any mortal, which are ſullied by no vain renown, which he only ſees who ſees in ſecret, and which under his inſpection never ceaſe to ſpread happineſs and joy through all the extent of his kingdom. O that thy predominance were univerſal! that every chriſtian were animated by thy warmth! and that every chriſtian, who hath not yet done it, might take thee for his model!

Yes, Sirs, this may the chriſtian, and this muſt he be! The light of the world,

the ſalt of the earth, the inſtructor, the pattern, the improver, the helper, the ſaviour of the reſt of mankind; a far more wiſe, more virtuous, and more uſeful citizen, a far greater benefactor to his brethren, than the wiſeſt, the beſt of men, who is not a chriſtian! This is his calling, this his election; and this muſt be the aim of his endeavours!

And it promiſes him, both in this and in the future world, far greater happineſs than to any other wiſe and virtuous man. Every degree of virtue renders us proportionably fit for happineſs; wherefore let us, no more than God, exclude any good man from all felicity. But chriſtian virtue is the way that leads to the pureſt and the ſublimeſt bliſs.—Walk then therein, O thou that haſt the happineſs to be called a chriſtian. This thou muſt do, if thou wouldſt eſcape eternal ruin, or be placed in a ſtate not altogether wretched. Wouldſt thou

thou be a chriſtian indeed, and turn the privileges of chriſtianity to thy real advantage, then muſt thou think more generouſly, and ſtrive at greater attainments, at ſuperiority over all thy brethren who are not chriſtians; aſpire after a higher felicity, that hereafter thou mayſt be, ſtill more than here, the leader, the teacher, the benefactor, the helper, of thy leſs perfect and leſs happy brethren; that thou mayſt be conſtantly approaching nearer to God, acquiring a greater reſemblance to Jeſus, and mayſt have evermore communion and fellowſhip with the Father and with his Son. What a proſpect! O let it be ever preſent to our minds, to our conſtant improvement in all chriſtian virtue, conſtantly bringing us nearer to perfection!

ESTIMATE XIV.

THE VALUE OF RELIGION IN GENERAL.

This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jeſus Chriſt, whom thou haſt ſent. John xvii. 3.

THE VALUE OF RELIGION IN GENERAL.

RELIGION, Sirs,—I ſpeak of true religion, founded on reaſon and revelation,—religion is very differently judged of by different perſons. One man deems it of little or no value, and another eſteems it beyond all price. The former holds it to be a hard and fruitleſs employment of the mind; while the other takes it for the moſt important, the moſt bleſſed occupation of the heart and life. To the former it is a heavy and oppreſſive yoke, which he endeavours by all means to ſhake off, a grievous reſtraint upon his freedom and

inclinations, a cruel diſturber of his joys, which he removes from himſelf as far as he can; to the latter it is the gentleſt ruler, the kindeſt and moſt generous friend and comforter, the moſt fertile ſource of ſatisfaction and joy. The firſt, therefore, meddles but ſeldom with it, confines it to certain times and places, and finds neither comfort nor benefit in it; the ſecond never loſes it out of his ſight, makes it his conſtant companion and guide along the path of life, and is continually receiving peace, and pleaſure, and aſſiſtance from it.

And we, Sirs, to which of theſe two claſſes of perſons do we belong? What is religion to us? How much value has it in our eſtimation? Of what importance is it to our heart? What influence has it on our lives? At leaſt we cannot be quite indifferent about it; otherwiſe we ſhould not frequent the aſſemblies of ſuch as worſhip God and Chriſt; ſhould there diſcover neither

neither attention nor ſentiment; and not do many things which we now do, nor neglect many others which we now neglect. But whether we acknowledge its whole worth; whether we revere it as the moſt precious gift of heaven; whether we prize it as highly as it deſerves; whether it be as dear, as advantageous, and as comfortable to us, as it may and ought; are queſtions which I can only anſwer for myſelf, and not for others. Religion is to me the moſt important, moſt indiſpenſable, and moſt exalted matter of which I can frame an idea, the greateſt benefit for which I ſtand indebted to heaven. It leads me more ſafely than any other light. It procures me more advantage and comfort, makes me more chearful and happy, than any other knowledge or ſcience, privilege or poſſeſſion, is able to do. Nor [redacted] once forget its value, or in the ſmalleſt degree depart from its directions to virtue and happineſs,

without ſuffering manifold detriment and prejudice.

Whoever thoroughly examines it, and ſincerely follows its injunctions, muſt find it prove what I have pronounced it to be. There are two matters, whereon, to this end, we muſt reflect.

The firſt is, how our religion muſt be framed, and how we are to be diſpoſed towards it, if we would experience the great advantages of it.

The next, whence it receives its value, or wherein it conſiſts.

Religion that is founded on error, and degenerated into gloomy ſuperſtition; religion which conſiſts in empty celebrations and ceremonies, or in the ſterile belief of incomprehenſible things; religion which only employs the mind of a man, as a

ſcience,

ſcience, as a theory of certain phænomena in the phyſical and moral world, but leaves his heart unamended and unmoved; religion which is not altogether moral, not immediately directed to the improvement of mankind, or which is even favourable to ſin and vice; ſuch a religion has indeed no value; and far be it from me to praiſe it for its excellency, or to ſay a word in its behalf. No, that religion alone which is built upon truth; which teaches us our duty to God, and to think and live in conformity to it; which provides for our manifold wants; which renders us wiſer and better, and which is adapted and deſigned in all its parts to promote our perfection and happineſs; this alone hath any real worth, this alone hath any title to our profoundeſt veneration and moſt cordial love. And of this kind is whatever we learn, by reflecting on the world, and rational meditation on God and the proper end of man: of this kind is that, in particular, which

God

God hath revealed to us of himſelf and his will, by his ſon Jeſus. This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jeſus Chriſt, whom thou haſt ſent.

But that this true, particularly that the chriſtian religion, which we revere as the moſt formal and moſt perfect means of revelation, may be valuable and excellent to us, before all things, we muſt underſtand it. We muſt acquire juſt and clear conceptions of its contents, of its deſigns, of its doctrines, precepts, and promiſes. Neither the name, nor the confeſſion, nor a blind reverence of religion, will make us wiſer, better, and happier. It does not operate upon us like a magical charm, without our knowledge or concurrence, but only in proportion as we underſtand it, reflect upon it, and actually uſe it. Attend therefore, O man, attend in this deſign to the voice of God in nature, to the voice of thy Creator and Father, who ſpeaks to thee in

in all his works; and confine thyſelf to the writings of the evangeliſts and apoſtles, who deliver to thee the doctrine of Jeſus in its primitive ſimplicity and purity. If thou hearkeneſt with attention to that voice, and draweſt from theſe copious ſources of truth, then will religion, devoid of all human interpolations and inventions, appear to thee with the moſt venerable aſpect, in her majeſtic unvarniſhed beauty, as a daughter of heaven, whom the Father hath ſent to mankind for their conſolation upon earth.

Would we, farther, have religion to be really and excellently valuable to us, then muſt we be aſſured of its truth, and of its divine deſcent. We muſt believe it, and believe it on principle, with ſatisfying certainty. So long as I am doubtful in this reſpect; ſo long as I take its doctrines for only probable conjectures, its precepts for well-meant uſeful rules of life, its pro-

miſes for deſireable events; ſo long may I eaſily eſteem and admire it to a certain degree, and it may have a certain influence on my ſentiments and my conduct: but I ſhall not experience its whole force to my amendment and my comfort; I ſhall not become ſo good, and ſo happy, as I may and ſhall when I accept its doctrines for truths of demonſtration, its precepts as the laws of my Supreme Sovereign and Judge, and its promiſes as infallible aſſurances of the true and unchangeable God. This belief only, then, makes religion intrinſically ſacred and important to me; this belief only, then, gives her the appearance and the power ſhe neceſſarily ought to have, when I take her for the governeſs of my heart, and the conductreſs of my life.

Yet even this is not enough. Would we have her to be to us, and to perform for us, what ſhe is ordained to be and to perform, then muſt we not only know and

believe her, but ſuffer ourſelves to be accompanied and guided by her. We muſt follow her directions to virtue and happineſs, ſubmit to her inſtructions, be animated by her ſpirit, and frame our whole behaviour on her precepts. She requires obedient and teachable diſciples: ſhe inſtructs, ſhe improves, ſhe comforts us, but not againſt our will, or without our concurrence. She offers the moſt ſalutary aliment to our curious and inquiſitive ſpirit; but we muſt take and enjoy this aliment, if we would have it to ſtrengthen and refreſh us. She will lead us by the hand on the way of virtue and happineſs; but we muſt actually walk that way, and purſue it with a firm and ſtedfaſt ſtep, if we would have her for our companion, and be comforted by her aſſiſtance. She promiſes us light, and help, and ſupport; but we muſt accept and uſe this light, this help, and this ſupport, if we would profit by her offers. Wouldſt thou, then, learn how properly

perly to eſtimate the value of religion, ſurrender thyſelf wholly to her direction, ſubmit thyſelf to her guidance in all times, in all places, under all events. Think conſtantly as ſhe teaches thee to think; do conſtantly that which ſhe calls thee to do; abide ſtedfaſtly by that which ſhe tells thee and promiſes thee on the part of God. Separate not from her in thy ordinary, thy daily courſe. Confine her not to the times and places deſtined to worſhip and devotion: call her not to thee barely to ſoothe thee in thy ſorrows, and to comfort thee in thy diſtreſs. She deſpiſes the friends and admirers, who only fly to her in misfortunes, in idle or melancholy hours, but drop all acquaintance with her when ſucceſs ſmiles upon them. No; ſhe muſt be thy counſellor in all thy undertakings and affairs, thy companion in ſolitude and in ſociety, thy cloſe and familiar friend in proſperity and in adverſity, in life and in death! Then wilt thou confeſs her entire

worth,

worth, and receive more ſubſtantial benefit from her, than from any thing whatever that mankind can poſſeſs.

And how great, how great indeed, is the value of religion to him who thus underſtands her, thus truſts in her, thus follows her ſuggeſtions in all his conduct, and ſo intimately attaches himſelf to her by ſenſibility and reflection! O could I repreſent to you her value, as I feel it myſelf, and render her as important to your underſtandings and your hearts, as ſhe is to me! It is religion that makes me wiſe; ſhe makes me good; ſhe makes me contented and chearful; ſhe teaches me how to uſe and enjoy the preſent; ſhe opens to me the loveliеſt proſpects in futurity; there promiſes me a higher, an eternal felicity, and at the ſame time renders me actually capable of it. Knowledge of truth, inclination and power to do good, a tranquil and contented heart, moderation in proſperity, com-

comfort and fortitude in adverſity, hope and aſſurance in life and death: theſe are thy gifts, O Religion! and how precious, how indiſpenſable to my happineſs!

Religion makes me wiſe; ſhe leads me to the knowledge of truth, the moſt important, the moſt indiſpenſable, the moſt ſacred truth! Without her, I ſhould wander in darkneſs, roam about a labyrinth of doubt, in ignorance of my origin, miſtaking my object; all that ſurrounds me, all that happens to me and to others, would be myſtery, indiſſoluble myſtery, to me; effects without cauſes, means without end, faculties without proper directions, numberleſs ſeries and conſequences of things without an intelligible connection, beauty, and order, produced from chance; virtue and vice, life and death, at inceſſant variance; moral creatures without conſiſtency; an immenſe world without a ſovereign and ruler; this would be the appearance

pearance of viſible things to me, and how muſt ſuch a view perplex my ſpirit! In what a dreadful abyſs of doubt and deſpondency muſt it ſink me! Loſt among the innumerable multitude of things which belong to this univerſe, alone and abandoned amidſt all the living creatures that ſurround me, nothing whereon to fix; nothing wherein to truſt; nothing that could lead me with ſafety in my thoughts and purſuits; nothing that I could conſider as the fixt object of my wiſhes, my deſires, and my endeavours; nothing that could unite me with other beings and things! Like a child, which cruelty or accident had abandoned to itſelf ſoon after its birth, I ſhould not know whom I had to thank for my being and my life, from whom I might expect the ſupport of it, who would take care of me, to whom I might look up for protection and help, and paternal love!

But thou, O divine Religion! thou freeſt me from this diſtreſſing perplexity; thou leadeſt me forth from this labyrinth of doubt, and guideſt me in the way of truth and aſſurance. Thou introduceſt me to God, and to the knowledge of the regard in which I ſtand towards him. Thou giveſt an Author, a Preſerver, a Ruler, and a Father, to me and to the whole world; and thereby diffuſeſt a light over all things, uniteſt all together, communicateſt life and order, importance and dignity to all. I now perceive that I am no longer loſt and forgotten in the immenſity of ſpace; am no longer the pitiable ſport of chance or fate; no longer an inſignificant, feeble, wretched creature, dependant on nothing, ignorant of its origin and end; wandering, without protector or guide, through the wilderneſs of life, this day or the next to become a prey to death. Under thy directions I have diſcovered God, have found a Father, the wiſeſt, the beſt of Fathers, who knows and loves

loves me; and I am his creature, his child, am formed after his likeneſs, am capable of his correſpondence, am and live and ſubſiſt in him and by him; know to what purpoſe he hath faſhioned and ordained me; dwell under his inſpection and care; know his tender diſpoſitions towards me, and nothing can deſtroy the bleſſed connection which binds me with him unalterably and for ever.

And how differently now does every object appear to me! What a totally different, what a brighter and more chearful aſpect does the world now wear to me, and how its greatneſs and beauty exalts and rejoices my ſpirit! Now I perceive and revere a firſt, eternal, and all-perfect Cauſe of every thing which is, and was, and will be; a God from whom all things proceed, by whom they are, and to whom they belong; a God extolled and praiſed by every particle of matter, every plant, every

beaſt, every man, every ſpirit, the heavens and the earth, as Almighty and All-wiſe, as the Being who is love itſelf. I now behold, on all ſides, as far as my eye can ſurvey, or my penetration reach, the pureſt beauty and the moſt harmonious order; all around me the wiſeſt and beſt deſigns, and the fitteſt means for their completion; on all ſides life, and joy, and happineſs, here in culture and in bud, there in bloom and in maturity. Now all things depend in the cloſeſt and moſt intimate union on each other, the ſmall and the great, the viſible and the inviſible, the grain of ſand on the ſhore of the ocean, and the all-chearing ſource of light; all is the work of one ſingle and all-perfect Spirit; all form but one whole; one intire whole, in which the natural and the moral, the good and the bad, the preſent and the future, are inſeparably bound and interwoven together; in which nothing is unneceſſary, nothing ſuperfluous, nothing unintended, nothing

purely bad and hurtful; an intire whole, which is ſupported and maintained by its infinite Author himſelf, which he diſpoſes and guides, and wherein all tends to the greateſt poſſible perfection and happineſs. And to know this, to be aſſured of theſe moſt ſublime, moſt fruitful, and moſt comfortable truths; to have them for the directing clue to our reflections and reſearches, for the rule of our behaviour, for the ground of our deſires and hopes, is this not wiſdom? Is it not greater, and ſublimer wiſdom, than all elſe that uſually bears the name? And muſt not the religion which leads us to this wiſdom, be of ineſtimable value to us? Muſt it not be the moſt precious gift of heaven?

As religion makes me wiſe, it alſo renders me good; and this is a ſecond demonſtration of its ſuperior worth and excellency. Religion is the band of love, the intimate tie of union between the Crea-

tor and his creatures, and between all thinking, feeling, and rational creatures with each other, the principle of the cloſeſt connection of the natural with the moral world, and the preſent with the future. And this love, this connection, this union, produces in every human heart it animates new ſpiritual life, freſh inclination and power to all goodneſs; more ſpiritual vigour, more deſire and ability to duty and to virtue, than any other conſideration, any other relation of things can do. And ſurely, when I know and venerate a God, who is my Creator, my Preſerver, my Benefactor, my Father, my Sovereign, and my Judge, and who hath given me laws, and hath annexed the moſt glorious rewards to the obſervance of them, and the ſevereſt puniſhments to the violation of them; theſe laws muſt be of the utmoſt importance to me! How ſacred, how inviolable, muſt they be! And when I behold this God every where in his works; hear his inſtructing,

ſtructing, his inciting and his warning voice, on every ſide I turn; feel myſelf encompaſſed by him and the effects of his wiſdom; revere him, wherever I am, in the thickeſt veil of darkneſs no leſs than in the brighteſt day, as the witneſs of my thoughts and actions: how ſhall I dare to think or to do any thing that militates with his will, or neglect any thing that he has enjoined? How can I be deficient in courage and ability, in his preſence and under his inſpection, to do readily and heartily that which is right and good, and beſt for the occaſion? And if I love this God, this Father, as religion teaches me, with filial affection, think on him, and raiſe myſelf to him with inward pleaſure, rejoice in his exiſtence, in his preſence, in his bounty, in his diſpoſitions towards me, and his communion with me: how eaſy and agreeable it muſt be to me to keep his commandments, to concur with his deſigns, and to labour, as it were, in fellowſhip with him for advancing the

univerſal perfection and felicity of his kingdom!

But, as religion connects the creatures with the Creator, ſo likewiſe does it connect the creatures with each other; ſo does it unite me alſo with all my fellow-mortals; it teaches me that they are all children of my heavenly Father, that we all compoſe but one large family, whoſe father is God, and whoſe firſt-born brother is his ſon Jeſus. And, if I believe this, if I have an inward ſentiment of this, I then live among my own brothers and ſiſters, who have the ſame origin and the ſame deſtination with myſelf: and, then, how muſt the ſight of every man, how muſt the diſpoſitions, the capacities, the abilities of every man, the pleaſures, the proſperity, the merits of every man, delight me! And, if I am animated with that brotherly love towards them which religion alone can inſpire, how impoſſible will it be for me to deprive them

of

of their property and goods, or to diſunite or injure them by any means whatever! How far from my heart will all pride and envy be, all hatred and indifference! How compaſſionate ſhall I be towards them, merciful as my Father in heaven is merciful, and beneficent as he is beneficent! And what duty towards my neighbour ſhall I then neglect? Which of them ſhall I diſcharge without fidelity and pleaſure?

And, if I do but feel the whole force of the love of God and of Chriſt towards man, which the chriſtian doctrine repreſents to us in ſo affecting a manner; if I have an inward ſentiment of what great things God hath done for me, how much his ſon Jeſus hath ſacrificed and ſuffered for me; if I take the diſpoſition and life of this my Deliverer for the rule of my conduct; if I look up to him as my Forerunner and Chief, and firmly confide in his promiſes; if I ſeriouſly conſider the connection

nection of the preſent with the future, regard one as the preliminary to the other, one as the time of ſowing and the other of reaping; what incitement, what ability to every thing that is right and good, that is great and generous, muſt not all this afford! No; if religion does not make me better, if it does not make me endeavour to become a good and virtuous man, I muſt then be incapable of amendment, muſt be deeply ſunk beneath the dignity of man, muſt have a completely inſenſible and thoroughly corrupted heart. And what a value muſt this likewiſe give to religion in our eſteem, if we do but properly underſtand the worth of moral goodneſs and virtue!

He that is wiſe and good, may alſo be contented and chearful; and the religion that procures us thoſe advantages, procures us likewiſe theſe. Far from inſpiring her true profeſſors with ſlaviſh fear and gloomy terrors,

terrors, ſhe fills them with confidence and courage. Far from being a diſturber of joy, ſhe opens to us the richeſt ſources of it, and invites us to them. Yes, if I follow her precepts, and believe in her promiſes: then tranquillity and joy take poſſeſſion of my breaſt; then am I aſſured of the grace of God, the forgiveneſs of my ſins, the good pleaſure of my Creator and Lord; then my heart no more torments and condemns me; then I enjoy the bleſſedneſs of a good conſcience. Yes, if I allow myſelf to be guided and conducted by her, and conſider all things in the light which ſhe diffuſes over them; then am I ſatisfied with all things; ſatisfied with God, whom I know and revere as the wiſeſt and moſt tender Father, and from whom I expect only good, and conſtantly the beſt; ſatisfied with all his arrangements and diſpoſitions in the natural and the moral world; ſatisfied with the place and the circumſtances wherein he hath ſet me, with the por-

portion of abilities and goods he hath granted me, with the term he hath allotted me, as I know that all this is adapted to my being, and deſigned for my happineſs; ſatisfied with myſelf, as I am conſcious of my uprightneſs and integrity, as I feel, as it were, that I do not wilfully tranſgreſs, and that I am approaching nearer to the mark of chriſtian perfection; ſatisfied with all my fellow-creatures, as I hate none, and envy none, as I love them all, rejoice with all the good, and am patient and indulgent to the frail and infirm; ſatisfied with all things about me, as every thing is, and is juſt ſo, as the all-wiſe and all-gracious God would have it to be!

Nay, when I allow myſelf to be guided by the light of Religion, and to be animated by her ſpirit, I find ſources of joy opening to me on all ſides, as pure as they are inexhauſtible; then I poſſeſs more real joy than the greateſt darling of fortune can have, who

who knows not this Giver of joy; then I rejoice in God, my Benefactor and Father; I rejoice in his ſon Jeſus, my Redeemer and Lord; I rejoice in my capacities and powers, in my high vocation; I rejoice in all the beautiful and good that is and happens in the world; I rejoice in all mankind as my brethren, as the children of my heavenly Father, as the partakers of my future felicity; I rejoice in every animate and inanimate creature, as it is the creature of my God; I rejoice in viſible and inviſible things, the preſent and the future; and am joyful that I am immortal, and may aſſuredly expect an everlaſting life, a never-ending felicity. And for this chearful confidence, this ſatisfaction, theſe manifold joys, I am indebted to Religion. How can I not perceive its worth! how can I miſtake its excellency?

Yes, this it is, this divine Religion, which conducts, ſtrengthens, comforts, and exhi-

exhilarates me, in all the viciſſitudes of my circumſtances, in whatever I do, and in whatever befalls me, in proſperity and in adverſity, in life and in death. She gives quite another appearance to all things; ſweetens every pleaſure to me, and augments every good; mitigates every hardſhip, and alleviates every ſorrow; ſupplies me with inſtruction, with ſupport, with conſolation and aſſiſtance. If I enjoy ſatisfaction and pleaſure, ſhe exalts the enjoyment by inſpiring me with the ſentiment that it is God who giveth me this ſatisfaction, who procureth me this pleaſure. Have I various and important duties to fulfill, toilſome affairs to manage, ſhe ſo alleviates and ennobles them, by repreſenting them to me as commiſſions from God, by aſſuring me that I am labouring in his ſervice, that I diſcharge my truſt under his inſpection, and with his concurrence. Does an opportunity occur to me for doing good, of being uſeful, and of pro-

promoting human happineſs, ſhe gives me to feel the whole weight of the honour of being an inſtrument in the hand of God, whereby he promotes his deſigns, and diſſeminates life and bleſſing amongſt the human race. Do I meet with difficulties on my way, do I fall into penury and danger, ſhe bids me lift my eyes and my heart towards heaven, and implore and expect ſuccour from him who doth what he will both in heaven and on the earth, and never willeth any thing but what is right and good. Am I oppreſſed by any burden of life, ſhe then bids me depend upon the ſupport of him who laid this load upon me, and to be aſſured that he will not impoſe on me more than I am able to bear. Does any misfortune overtake me, I then adore in ſilent reverence, as inſtructed by Religion, the hand of him who inflicts it upon me, who inflicts it upon me for wiſe and good purpoſes, and without whoſe permiſſion no harm can happen unto me.

Do ſufferings fall to my lot, which I have not deſerved, I take them as the diſpenſations of my God and Father, with filial ſubmiſſion; revere them as the means of nurture and exerciſe, by which he would lead me to higher perfection; and I know that, ſooner or later, all will turn to my good. Am I alarmed and perplexed at any extraordinary or terrifying events that happen in the world, and among mankind, then, full of faith, I look up to him who governs all things, directing them by the laws of ſovereign wiſdom, and tranquillize my ſpirit by the conſideration that he will certainly, at length, bring to paſs ſome good thereby. Do my honeſt undertakings, my good and beneficent endeavours, fail of ſucceſs, I then make an offering of my will to the far wiſer and far better will of my God and Father; ſatisfy myſelf with the conſciouſneſs of having acted uprightly and well-pleaſing to him; and therefore reckon not my pains and

labour

labour as loſt, as I know that in his kingdom, and under his adminiſtration, nothing good can poſſibly be loſt. Do the infirmities of age oppreſs me, diminiſh my faculties, and bow down my body to the earth, I commit myſelf to that God, who, in my infancy, in my childhood, in my youth, and in my manhood, has never forſaken me, who has been conſtantly my ſupport and my father, and will be ſo for ever. Does death draw nigh me, does he bid me ſet my houſe in order, and prepare to quit all viſible and earthly things, I then hear the voice of my heavenly Father calling me to himſelf, calling me from the preſent into another and a higher life, calling me home from my pilgrimage. Conducted and ſupported by religion, I follow this call with joy, enter with confidence the gloomy path of death, paſs through it undiſmayed, and am certain that it will terminate in the pureſt light, in unending felicity to me.

Thus am I taught, thus led, thus charmed, thus ſupported and ſtrengthened, thus comforted by religion, in proſperity and adverſity, in life and in death! Thus does ſhe preſerve her value in all times, in all places, in all circumſtances, in regard to all my affairs, all my intentions and purſuits, unchangeably continuing what ſhe is; conſtantly the ſafeſt teacher, the moſt faithful guide, and the beſt comforter of man! Yes, O divine Religion, that art thou, that wilt thou ever be to me, what thou haſt hitherto been! ever my trueſt friend, my inſeparable guide along the path of life, the partaker of all my joys and ſorrows, my conſolation in death, and my conductor to the manſions of heaven! Yes, O God! to know thee, the only true God, the all-wiſe, the all-bountiful, the Father of men, to know thee, and him whom thou haſt ſent, our Saviour Jeſus, this is life eternal, the ſupreme, everlaſting bliſs!

ESTI-

ESTIMATE XV.

THE VALUE OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION, IN PARTICULAR.

I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

John x. 10.

THE VALUE OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION, IN PARTICULAR.

THE arrival of a Perſon who promiſes life, and more abundant life, that is, complete felicity, to them to whom he comes, and is able to fulfill his promiſe, muſt be moſt deſireable to ſuch as have vehement deſires after happineſs, and at the ſame time are oppreſſed with the inward ſentiment of their want of it! And who of us, Sirs, can miſtake this wiſhed-for Perſon, who the happy Man that brought theſe joyful tidings? How eager are all men after happineſs! and how little true

felicity, how much actual miſery, was there among mortals when Jeſus made his appearance in the world, and offered them their deliverance from miſery, and the poſſeſſion of that happineſs they had ſo long ſought for in vain! and how great a right he had to make them this offer! Knew he not all the ſources of their happineſs? Opened he not all of them to the human race? Where is there one that ever drew from thoſe ſources, and yet found his expectations deceived? And how many thouſands, and thouſands again, have actually drawn therefrom, and found their thirſt after happineſs aſſuaged!

To us alſo theſe ſources ſtand open; and we are invited to them by the Saviour who came into the world, to impart life, and abundance of it. Let us, then, approach theſe ſources, ſtudy to know more of theſe bleſſings, compare them with our wants and defects; and then examine whether we may

may not be happy likewiſe, or whether our happineſs may not be augmented and improved.

What are, then, the principal wants of man?

And how can and will Jeſus ſupply them, and thereby render him happy?

To anſwer theſe queſtions will be the ſubject and ſcope of my preſent diſcourſe.

Light for the underſtanding; reſt for the heart; courage and ability to do good; comfort in diſtreſſes; hope for the future: theſe are the principal wants of man. Whoever removes theſe, delivers him from the burden of his miſery, opens to him the richeſt ſources of felicity, and makes him truly happy. And this the Saviour of men, who came into the world, both can and will perform. He can and will, in all theſe

reſpects, give them life, and greater abundance of it.

Light for the underſtanding, is the firſt and moſt urgent want of the thinking man. To act with conſciouſneſs and conſideration; to reflect upon what he ſees, what he hears, what he feels, and what befalls him; to inquire into the cauſes and ſcope of things; to look back upon the paſt, to expatiate in the future, and to compare them both with the preſent; is the natural employment, the moſt eſſential privilege of man; it is this which renders him a man. To ſcrutinize after truth, and to embrace the truth, is the life and the nutriment of his ſpirit. But how long can he employ himſelf in any reflection, without entangling himſelf in a labyrinth, whoſe outlet he can never find! How far can he proceed in the inveſtigation and the knowledge of truth, without ſtarting at ſome precipice, which fills him with terror, and makes him recoil!

recoil! How ſoon will he be deceived by error and the proluſions of fancy, or oppreſſed by ignorance or doubt, if he have no faithful conductor through the intricacies of human thought!

What am I, and what is all that ſurrounds me? Whence am I, and whence have all theſe ariſen? To what end am I, to what end are all theſe ordained? Does intelligence preſide, or chance, wiſdom, or blind neceſſity, in the concatenation of things, in the occurrences of the world, in the fortunes of men? Are wiſdom, virtue, and happineſs, real attainable things, or only empty names? Which is the way that leads to the knowledge of truth, to the poſſeſſion of virtue, to the enjoyment of happineſs? Is there a God? Is there a Providence! In what relationſhip ſtands this God to the world and to me? How far does this Providence extend over the world and me? What have I, in theſe reſpects,

to

to hope for or to fear?—What queſtions! How difficult to be anſwered by the man that is left to himſelf! What error is too abſurd for him to plunge into in reſearches like theſe! and yet how important is their ſolution! How every thing muſt torment a reflecting mind, that cannot account for it in any rational manner! Yes, here a man feels the want of ſome certain guide, ſome ſuperior light. Here he longs for this director, for this light, as a pilgrim, overtaken by the night in ſome lone and trackleſs wild, longs for the genial effulgence of the morning ſun, or to meet with ſome traveller acquainted with the way.

Chriſt, this bright effulgence of the glorious day, hath appeared to our relief! God hath ſent to us this faithful guide! He calls to us, in our forlorn eſtate: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; I am the Light of the world; he that followeth me walketh not in darkneſs. No; his divine

vine doctrine has diſperſed the darkneſs of error and doubt, of ignorance and ſuperſtition, with which the wiſe and the unwiſe, the learned and the unlearned, were till then ſurrounded. He hath brought concealed and miſtaken truth to light; and what was but little, and that little only doubtfully known, hath he divulged to all, and placed it beyond all doubt. He hath brought us to the knowledge of God, the true, the only God, and thereby given firmneſs and aſſurance to the human intellects. By him enlightened, we know our origin, and the origin of all things, our deſtination, and that of all living and ſenſible beings. By him inſtructed, we know that there is a God, a ſupremely perfect Spirit, an infinitely wiſe and bountiful Father of the world and of mankind, and that we are his creatures, his children; that we and all things ſubſiſt under his inſpection and providential care; that all is diſpoſed, conducted, and governed by him,

and

and all made to conduce to the beſt and worthieſt purpoſes.—And now chance, and hazard, and blind neceſſity, with all their terrors, vaniſh from before our eyes. Now no intricacies bewilder us, we are no longer perplexed by any apparent diſorder and contradiction in the combination of things, in the complication of human concerns. Now light, order, beauty, perfection, are diſplayed in all things; for all are effects and arrangements of ſupreme benignity and wiſdom. The entrance to the ſanctuary of truth, the moſt important, moſt comfortable truth, ſtand open to us; the way of virtue is made plain and bright, and leads us ſtraight to the manſions of bliſs, where we are all invited to the enjoyment of its treaſures. We have now a certain clue to guide us through the labyrinth of afflictions, by means of which we can avoid every pit and precipice, are furniſhed with all neceſſary light, and proceed to meet the full beam of day.——Yes, look

to

to Jeſus for the ſupply of your wants, all you who thirſt after the knowledge of truth. Imbibe his doctrine, adhere firmly and confidently to it, ſtudy it in the writings which ſome of his intimates have left us. They cannot, they will not lead you aſtray; you will improve conſtantly in wiſdom, and acquire complete ſatisfaction.

Reſt for the heart; reſt under the ſentiment of our weakneſs; reſt amidſt the violence and impetuoſity of the paſſions; reſt under the conſciouſneſs of our tranſgreſſions and ſins; reſt, at the ſight of the ſeeming perplexity in the courſe of things, and of human miſery; reſt amidſt the great frailty and inconſtancy of every thing ſenſible and earthly: what requiſites, what cogent requiſites, are theſe! Who will ſupply them? Where ſhall a man ſeek and find this reſt? In what ſchool of wiſdom, in what temple of mirth, in what ſilent and deſert ſolitude, or in what brilliant abode of pleaſure,

ſure, in what rank, in which of the claſſes of mankind, ſhall we ſearch after it and find it? Oh, how earneſtly do the wiſe and the ignorant, the high and low, the rich and the poor, the hermit and the epicure, ſtrive after this repoſe! With what eagerneſs of expectation do they now ſtrike into this path, and then into that! and, at length, ſooner or later, affected by repeated diſappointments, how they return by the way that they went, ſighing and aſhamed at their ficklenes and folly, and joining at laſt in that diſmal complaint, All, all is vanity, and vexation of ſpirit!

But why, Sirs, why do you ſeek reſt where it is not to be found? O come to him, ſeek it of him, who hath promiſed to give you likewiſe in this reſpect life, and more abundance of it! him who reſtores to men the peace which they had miſtaken, and driven from their hearts and their dwellings! Hear what he ſays to every

honeſt ſoul which ſeeks that reſt of him he announces on the part of God, and how he ſupplies every want of the heart.

O thou, who art ſenſible of thy infirmities, do not endeavour to repreſs that ſentiment. God, thy Sovereign and thy Father, requires nothing of thee that thou art unable to perform. He lays no burdens on thee that are too heavy for thee to bear. Only exert thy faculties, and they will grow ſtronger by exerciſe. He who faithfully employs the powers he has, will be ever receiving greater. Thou haſt the Almighty for thy ſupport; and his ſtrength is mighty, above all expectation, in the feeble that look up to him, and depend upon him. At preſent thou art but a child; hereafter, if thou only retaineſt the ſimplicity of a child, thou wilt arrive at manhood, and ſhalt perform manly actions, ſuch actions as I have atchieved.

Doſt

Doſt thou feel deſires within thee, which none of all the things that ſurround thee are able to appeaſe or to ſatisfy? O learn, from thence, that thou art not made for this world alone; that greater capacities, and nobler faculties, lie concealed in thee than belong to the courſe of thy life on earth. Direct thy deſires to God, and to futurity; let the love of truth, of virtue, of God and man, pervade and poſſeſs thy heart. Theſe are goods and bleſſings that are worthy thy moſt ſtrenuous endeavours, which will employ all thy faculties and powers, which leave neither repugnance nor diſguſt, nor languor nor ſatiety, behind them. Wage war, then, againſt pleaſure and paſſion. The prize that awaits thee is worth the conflict. Whoever contendeth and conquereth here, in my cauſe, ſhall reign hereafter with me: he that loſeth his life, or any thing elſe, for my ſake, ſhall find it again.

Does the conſciouſneſs of thy paſt ſins and failings diſturb thee, doſt thou dread the diſpleaſure and the puniſhment of the Judge of the world! then accept the glad tidings he commiſſioned me to announce to ſinful man. Accept them, and rejoice that God, thy Sovereign and thy Judge, is alſo thy Father; that he is gracious and merciful, ſlow to anger, and of great goodneſs; that he forgives the repentant and returning ſinner all his ſins, remits his puniſhment, reſtores him to his once ſlighted favour, and will grant him grace for juſtice. To aſſure thee thereof he ſent me upon the earth. Sin is done away by obedience to my precepts; by following my injunctions, iniquity is remembered no more; reconcilement between God and man is thus procured by me. Only beware of the deceitfulneſs of ſin; reſcue thyſelf more and more from its ſhameful dominion; preſerve thy regained freedom; redouble thy zeal in goodneſs; devote thyſelf by grati-

tude and love to thy gracious Benefactor and Patron, and be faithful unto the end: and then ſhall thy former tranſgreſſions be remembered no more, and their ruinous conſequences ſhall be removed for ever.

At times art thou diſmayed at the ſight of ſo ſeemingly perplexed a ſcene of things as the preſent ſtate affords, and the diverſity of miſery that prevails among mankind? Tranquillize thy ſpirit in the conſideration of the parental providence and love of thy heavenly Father, whoſe thoughts and ways are as far above thy thoughts and ways as the heavens are above the earth. Leave it to him how the world ſhould be governed, and the ends of his creation obtained: and be aſſured that his deſigns will not fail, and that his purpoſe is nothing but felicity and perfection. Judge not by that ſpan of ſpace, by that moment of time, which thou art allowed to ſurvey: extend thy comprehenſion, if thou canſt, to the

the whole, and let thy mind expatiate in eternity; and doubt not but all will be ſooner or later unraveled, and ſhewn to be conformable to the laws of Supreme Wiſdom and Goodneſs. He, the ſupremely Wiſe, the ſupremely Good, comprehendeth all things, can produce light out of darkneſs, and turn every evil into a ſource of joy.

Does the uncertainty and inſtability of all earthly things diſmay thy ſpirit, and deſtroy thy peace? O learn, then, to eſteem thoſe things as what they really are; and while thou ſeeſt that the world, with its pleaſures, paſſeth away, forget not that he who doth the will of God abideth for ever; forget not that thy ſpirit is immortal, and that an unchangeable, undecaying, and incorruptible heritage is allotted thee in heaven. Soar above this tranſient ſcene of vanity, and conſider thyſelf as a denizen of the city of God, which hath firm foun-

dations, and is thy true, thy permanent country. Thus does Jeſus inſpire with peace and ſatisfaction the man who ſeeks them of him: thus does he ſupply all the wants of our heart: thus does he give us likewiſe in this reſpect life, and greater abundance of it.

Courage and ability in goodneſs is a third and no leſs urgent want of the thinking man. Unleſs this be ſupplied, how can he be contented and happy! He is ſenſible of powers, various active powers, within him. But how and to what ſhall he apply them? What ſhall he hope to execute with them? Can he, or will he, diſcomfit his weakneſs, conquer his dependance on ſenſible things, and overcome himſelf? Is not virtue too exalted for the reach of his faculties? Is ſhe not probably deſigned for beings of a ſuperior order to man? Is ſhe not rather a daughter of heaven than the offspring of earth? As many

many powers as he feels himſelf to poſſeſs, ſo many obſtacles and difficulties does he meet with in his endeavours to uſe them. Reſpectable and venerable are the dictates of reaſon; importunate and alluring are the requiſitions of ſenſe. For every incitement he perceives on one hand to goodneſs, he ſees a temptation and inducement on the other to evil. Who can proceed in ſo ſlippery a path with firm and vigorous ſteps! Who can live confident and ſecure amidſt enemies and dangers! Who can ſet himſelf to oppoſe the impetuoſity of a torrent!

The chriſtian can do it. In this reſpect alſo Jeſus gives him life, and a greater abundance of it. With him new ſpiritual life was imparted to mankind. Feeble, torpid, and dead, as the moral world appeared before his birth, it acquired a freſh activity, a nobler life, by his doctrine, by the moving of his ſpirit within it. The

way of virtue had been ſo long abandoned, it was become a deſert; thorns and briars choked up its unfrequented paths, or concealed them with impenetrable ſhade: the traveller now walks them with ſatisfaction and delight; Jeſus has cleared them for his followers, made the crooked ſtrait, and the rough places plain. He became a light to our feet, and a lantern to our paths.—Follow, then, O thou that aſpireſt after freedom and virtue, who wiſheſt to ſoar above ſenſible things, and to become wiſe and good; follow the guidance of Jeſus, follow his example, tread in his ſteps, be a chriſtian with all thy heart. This will inſpire thee with new powers, and animate thee with new life. Thou wilt learn to feel the dignity of man, the dignity of a chriſtian; and this ſentiment will not allow thee to be wanting in courage and capacity for goodneſs. Thou wilt love God, and learn to love mankind; and this love will render every duty familiar and pleaſant to thee.

thee. Chriſt will live and govern in thee; his mind, his ſpirit will direct thee, and through him thou canſt do all things. His brilliant example will be ever before thine eyes, conſtantly alluring thee to imitation, and warning thee of every devious and oblique way; and while thou ſeeſt the traces of his ſteps before thee, thou wilt purſue thy courſe in confidence and ſafety. The aſſurance of his ſupport, the conſciouſneſs of his approbation, the generous ambition of reſembling him farther, and thereby becoming capable of greater felicity, will never allow thee to be faint or fatigued in the imitation of him. His promiſes will ſtrengthen thee. The victor's crown, he holds out to thee, at the end of thy courſe will ſhine upon thee in all its radiance; and the moſt glorious proſpects he opens to thee, in futurity, will encourage thee to vanquiſh every difficulty, firmly to brave the hardeſt conflicts, and to perſevere unto the end. Yes, the faith of the

chriſtian overcomes the world, conquers all oppoſition, is an inexhauſtible ſource of ſpiritual life, and ſpiritual force. So certainly as thou alloweſt thyſelf to be thoroughly animated by the ſpirit of chriſtianity, and to be guided by its precepts, ſo certainly wilt thou be thoroughly free, thoroughly virtuous, and become as perfect as a human creature can be.

Comfort in afflictions! who can deny this a place among the wants of mankind? Who has not often fel how great, how preſſing it is? For who has not often ſuffered, and earneſtly looked around him for refreſhment and comfort? Without ſuffering, no man hath ever yet finiſhed his earthly courſe. To be frail and mortal, and to live among merely frail and mortal creatures and things, and to keep free from all ſufferings, is a contradiction in terms. The very enjoyments of this life are, for the moſt part, ſo interwoven with ſuffer-

ings, that they cannot be purely poſſeſſed. And how infinitely diverſified are they! Inward and outward ſufferings; ſufferings of the mind; ſufferings of the body; ſufferings of affection; ſufferings of friendſhip; and ſufferings of virtue. And how rapidly do they ſucceed each other! How often do they unite in numbers and in bitterneſs! And what can alleviate the burden of them to me? What can teach me to bear them with ſedateneſs and fortitude? What can give me comfort and confidence when I ſuffer want; when I labour under pain; when ſo many attacks are made upon my welfare and my pleaſures; when oppreſſed by cares and ſorrows; when in conflict with ſuch obſtacles and contradictions; when I fail in my good deſigns, and cannot enjoy the fruit of my virtue; when my friends forſake me, my powers decay, and the infirmities of age oppreſs me? Can I expect aſſiſtance from mankind, who are as feeble as myſelf? Can riches, or honours,

nours, or diſſipations, or a ſplendid luxurious life, aſſuage my pains and heal my wounds? Or can I be relieved by the ſight of ſuch numbers of the unhappy, who ſuffer as much as myſelf, or even more than I?

No, my chriſtian brother, this is what Jeſus alone can do. He, who himſelf did ſuffer ſo much, was made perfect through ſufferings, and by ſufferings entered into his glory. He knows the ſufferings of human nature, he hath undergone them himſelf, dignified them, and given them another aſpect. He can, he will conſole thee; will in this reſpect likewiſe give thee life, and abundance of it. Accept his offered comfort, and let him reſtore thy ſoul. He ſaith to thee, Even ſufferings come from God; they are the ordinances and diſpenſations of thy Father in heaven; and whatever he, the All-wiſe, the All-bountiful ordains, what he, thy Father, lays upon thee,

thee, is good, and muſt and will advance thy welfare. Heartily would he ſpare thee, and all his children upon earth, from ſorrows, had he not in view to exerciſe and improve thee, and attract thee to a ſuperior life. Heartily would he grant thee pure delights, and let all things go according to thy wiſh, if thou wert already capable of bearing ſuch ſucceſs. He corrects, he proves, he exerciſes thee, becauſe he loves thee, and becauſe his love embraces all thy being, and provides for thy future welfare as well as for thy preſent. The path of ſorrow is, indeed, a rough and gloomy path; but it leads to perfection and happineſs ſuch as firmly and piouſly purſue it. Even ſufferings are benefits, when God inflicts them on his children, to teach them obedience, fortitude, and faith. Even ſufferings, to ſuch as patiently endure, and wiſely uſe them, will, ſooner or later, become a ſource of bleſſing. What they now ſow in tears, they ſhall hereafter reap in joy.

joy. The ſufferings of this preſent time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that ſhall hereafter be revealed in us. No; bear, endure, and ſuffer without repining, and with filial reſignation, what thy Father in heaven calls thee to bear, to endure, and to ſuffer. He knows thy wants, and thy powers, and every burden he lays upon thee is adapted to them. He deſigns thee for his kingdom, and knows how beſt to prepare and fit thee for it. Look unto me, ſays Jeſus to his confeſſors, look unto me, thy Precurſor and Guide. Bear and ſuffer, as I have borne and ſuffered; fight the conflicts which I have fought, and in which ſo many of my followers have ſucceſsfully ſtriven. The end of thy way will be pure and exalted bliſs, the prize of thy victory will be eminent glory and honour. And what can inſpire us with comfort in ſorrows, if ſuch promiſes and ſuch proſpects are unable to do it?

Hope,

Hope, a ſure and certain hope for the future, is another want of man, which it is uncommonly neceſſary for him to ſupply. The more tranſitory the preſent, the ſhorter and more uncertain his duration here, the more ſteadily muſt he direct his eyes and his deſires towards futurity, the leſs indifferent can he be concerning what he has there to hope. for, or to fear: that, ſooner or later, to-day or to-morrow, all outward viſible things will vaniſh away to him, and be ſunk in the profoundeſt obſcurity of night; that, ſooner or later, to-day or to-morrow, his riches, his diſtinctions, his honours, his power, his beauty, his health, all that he is and poſſeſſes as an inhabitant of this world, muſt be loſt to him; that, ſooner or later, to-day or to-morrow, a dark and lonely grave will incloſe his body, and diſſolve it into duſt; that, ſooner or later, to-day or to-morrow, he will quit this world, with all its glories and all its joys, and paſs into a different, to him an unknown

known ſtate; is what he knows, and what he feels; this every pain declares, every infirmity, every ſickneſs, the departure of every acquaintance and friend, every ſtroke of the paſſing-bell, every open grave, every tomb, every church-yard hillock, with an inceſſant voice. And where is the man whom this does not affect, whom it does not plunge in deep reflection, whom it does not frequently alarm with concern and doubt!

Is then this night to laſt for ever? Are all theſe beauties and ſatisfactions to vaniſh away from before me for ever? Am I eternally to loſe them all, and to be made amends for them by nothing? Am I, then, wholly duſt? Is this viſionary life my whole exiſtence? Do I totally ceaſe to be, when my body ceaſes to move, and the blood to flow in my veins? And, if that which thinks and acts within me ſurvive the diſſolution of my body, what will be

my portion then? Into what region of all the immenſity of ſpace ſhall I be tranſported? Who will be there my Leader and Guide? What joys, or what ſorrows, what recompences, await me there? How is the preſent connected with the future? Oh, who will diſpel this darkneſs from before my eyes! who will ſolve theſe doubts! Who will give me that light and certainty, without which I cannot here be ſatisfied!

This alſo, my chriſtian brother, this alſo can Jeſus do, and will; he who promiſes thee life, and more abundance of it. Even this thy want he powerfully ſupplies, the Conqueror of death and the grave, the Reſtorer of life and felicity. He manifeſted himſelf upon the earth to aſſure thee of this in the fulleſt manner, to die upon the croſs, and to riſe again from the dead. I, ſays he, I am the reſurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, ſhall not die eternally; he ſhall preſs through death

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to a better life. No; this life is not the whole of thy being; it is only the firſt, the loweſt ſtep of thy exiſtence. No; thou art not wholly duſt; thy ſpirit is of divine deſcent, it is immortal, will riſe above the duſt, and ſhall not ſee corruption. No; the night that ſurrounds thee in death, will not eternally, will not long endure; the morn will come, and a glorious day ariſe. No; the loſs thou ſuffereſt then is not irreparable, the friends thou then wilt loſe are not for ever loſt; infinitely more joys and bleſſings await thee in the future world, than thou couldſt enjoy in the preſent. Therefore ſhudder not thou at the preſence of death, tremble not thou at the grave, be not thou diſmayed at the darkneſs and gloom of the valley of the ſhadow of death, nor at what will be the portion of thy heritage for ever. Be faithful to God, and to thy duty; think and live conſtantly as beſits a chriſtian; and then will thy death be a paſſage into a better, a ſuperior life; then

then wilt thou, with confidence, ſee before thee the reſurrection of the dead; then wilt thou enter the abode where thy Chief, thy Lord, thy Redeemer is, and take part in his glory; and he, who now is thy Example and Guide, will alſo be thy Leader through the valley of death, thy Lord for Eternity. There wilt thou reap the fruit of every good thought and action, and a conſtantly increaſing perfection and felicity will be the reward of thy fidelity. What hopes! what proſpects! Animated by theſe, how confidently may we meet futurity! how unconcernedly behold all that is viſible and earthly, changing, revolving, ſinking hence, and vaniſhing away!

Thus are all our wants ſupplied by Jeſus. Thus do we find light to our underſtanding, reſt for our heart, courage and ability to goodneſs, comfort in ſorrow, hope in futurity; thus life and abundance thereof with him. Thus does he free us from

every kind of miſery, and lead us to the higheſt felicity whereof we are capable. Oh let us, then, rejoicç in him, and his entrance into the world, and his great buſineſs on earth; let us adhere firmly to him, and give up ourſelves intirely to his guidance and direction! Replete with affection and gratitude, let us profit by the ſources of knowledge, of wiſdom, and virtue, which he has opened to us. They are pure, and they are inexhauſtible. He that drinketh of this water ſhall not thirſt for ever He that draws from theſe ſources, will draw joy and felicity, both for the preſent and the future life. Oh, let us all do ſo. and thus aſſuage our thirſt after truth and certainty, after peace of mind, perfection, and felicity!

ESTI-

ESTIMATE XVI.

THE VALUE OF CHRISTIANITY,

In regard of the

GENERAL ADVANTAGE

IT HAS

Procured to MANKIND, and ſtill procures.

Old things are paſt away; behold, all things are become new. 2 Cor. v. 17.

THE VALUE OF CHRISTIANITY,

In regard of the

GENERAL ADVANTAGE it has procured to MANKIND, and ſtill procures.

WE all of us enjoy the advantages accruing to us from the appearance of Jeſus among men, and his great work upon earth. Why are we uſed to celebrate the feſtival of his birth, why paſs this day more chearfully than all others? Our joy is undoubtedly very proper and becoming; it reſts upon the moſt ſolid foundations, on events ſuperlatively de-

ſireable and joyful. But is our joy likewiſe rational? Do we know, do we rightly conſider what a bleſſed influence chriſtianity has on our welfare, and in general on the welfare of mankind? And is this the reaſon that the conſideration of the birth of Jeſus, the founder of chriſtianity, is ſo joyful to us?—I ſhall endeavour to advance this knowledge, and promote theſe reflections in you, by my preſent diſcourſe, and thereby render more rational and lively the joy the return of this day excites. We are naturally furniſhed with an occaſion hereto by the words of our text. Old things are paſt away, ſays the apoſtle, behold, all things are become new. Judaiſm, would he ſay, Judaiſm, with all its burden, ſome ordinances and cuſtoms, is ſuperſeded by the chriſtian doctrine; the wall of ſeparation between the Jews and Heathens is broken down; chriſtianity has produced a great and happy revolution of ſentiments and manners, in religion and worſhip, in the

the whole ſtate of mankind; it has done much for the advancement of their perfection and happineſs.

Let us, therefore, from theſe words, conſider the general advantage that chriſtianity has procured to the human race in general, and ſtill procures; advantages which even they who deny or doubt of the divine origin of the chriſtian doctrines, muſt allow to be highly valuable and important.

We may reduce theſe advantages to four chief heads. The firſt comprehends knowledge; the ſecond, virtue; the third, tranquillity; and the fourth, the outward condition of men.

Firſt, the cultivation of the human mind, and the knowledge of truth in general, has been improved and promoted by chriſtianity among mankind. As chriſtianity

does not, like the old heathen religion, conſiſt in celebrations and ceremonies, in ſolemnities and ſacrifices, but in doctrines and moral precepts; ſo muſt it neceſſarily have excited mankind, by degrees, to more reflection on inviſible, ſpiritual, and moral matters, on their mutual relation and connection with each other, on what they are at preſent, and what they will be hereafter; and theſe reflections muſt, by degrees, have ſpread themſelves among all ranks and conditions of men, which, till then, only the wiſe, as they were called, were in poſſeſſion of. By this means the culture of the human mind, in general, has been very much promoted, and will in courſe of time continue to be more ſo, as mankind proceed to perceive how far chriſtianity is from enfeebling the rights of ſound reaſon, and how favourable it is, on the contrary, to the free inveſtigation of truth. By this means many precepts of wiſdom, much knowledge, which were formerly looked upon

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as the peculiar property of the philoſophers, are already incorporated into the general maſs of human knowledge; and thus, by degrees, all that is uſeful and good of this kind, together with the peculiar doctrines of religion, will be a known and ſerviceable treaſure to every man, and be delivered and accepted to the purpoſe of acquiring wiſdom and knowledge by every man. Thus much, at leaſt, is certain, that, among none of the heathen nations, the Greek and Roman not excepted, were there ſuch numbers of perſons, of all ranks, who reflected on their moſt important concerns, on God and religion, on morality and virtue, on the end of their exiſtence, and their immortality, and by reflection proceeded ſo far, as among the chriſtians; and, for this extraordinary circumſtance, I know of no conſiſtent reaſon to be given, but that of chriſtianity itſelf. I will not deny, that, conſidered as a predominant religion, at certain times it has been as great

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an impediment to reflection and liberal inquiry as heatheniſm; and that, at times, it has confiſted, in regard of the generality of its profeſſors, in a blind implicit belief. But I ſpeak at preſent of the advantages we owe to chriſtianity, conſidered at large; and if it has not, at all times, and always in the ſame degree, been productive of them by the fault of mankind, yet they ſtill ſubſiſted, and it is undeniable that we are at preſent greatly indebted to its ſalutary influence.

Let it not be ſaid that we are chiefly obliged to the writings of the antient ſages of Greece and Rome, and the general publication of them, for the cultivation of the human mind, and the progreſs human knowledge has made. If we examine the matter thoroughly, we ſhall find that even the benefits we have obtained from that quarter, and ſtill may obtain, are all derived from chriſtianity. I decry not the writings

writings of theſe antient ſages: I am ſenſible to the beautiful, the true, and the good they contain. But what has preſerved theſe writings to us, and preſented us with them? Is it not chriſtianity that has procured them to us, and, as it were, given us them afreſh? How happened it that the languages wherein theſe writings are compoſed, and which were no longer ſpoken any where, were ſtudied and purſued, but becauſe the worſhip of ſeveral chriſtians was performed in them, and becauſe they were the languages of their ſacred books? Had it not been for this, would they not, like many other antient languages, which are only known to us by their names, have fallen into complete oblivion, and, with the treaſures of wiſdom they contain, have become a prey to all-devouring time?

But, if chriſtianity be favourable to the advancement of human ſcience in general, the knowledge of God and of religion in parti-

particular has been much more benefited thereby. How widely has the doctrine of the eternity of God been diffeminated by chriſtianity! Not only all chriſtians of every ſect and denomination, but even all mohammedans, who inhabit ſo conſiderable a part of the earth, and are probably ſtill more numerous than the chriſtians, are indebted for their belief of one true God, that firſt principle of all real religion, to the chriſtian revelation. And how important is this doctrine! By it alone the world becomes to us a perfect ſyſtem, wherein all things are moſt intimately connected together, and tend to one and the ſame great end. By this doctrine alone man is taught to know the Author of his exiſtence, the Source of his felicity, the Supreme Object of his adoration, the Foundation of his hopes. Enlightened by this doctrine, he no longer conſiders himſelf as a fatherleſs orphan, or as the offspring of blind chance, or groaning under the authority of ſeveral

powerful

powerful beings to him unknown, and at variance with each other. He knows from whom he ſprings, on whom he depends, under whoſe inſpection he is, and will for ever be; and he has now a certain fixed point, in which all his thoughts, deſires, endeavours, deſigns, and hopes, unite as in their proper centre.

How greatly has the prevalence of idolatry been diminiſhed in the world by chriſtianity! and how many regions of it are freed from the tyrannical ſway of ſuperſtition, and from the iron ſceptre of cunning and ſelf-intereſted prieſts! and what ſlaviſh notions, what tormenting uncertainty, what fears, what terrors, what childiſh ſentiments, what empty hopes and frivolous joys, muſt debaſe and perplex mankind, where the abominations of idolatry prevail! Calamities and horrors, from which chriſtianity has redeemed millions of human creatures, and ourſelves among them; and

by their abolition has prepared the way for millions of mankind, and for us among them, to liberty, to peace of mind, to firm and generous principles! That we are now no longer terrified at every uncommon appearance in nature; that we no longer perceive, at every ſtep we take, the prognoſtications and ſigns of imminent misfortune or approaching danger; that we are not continually obliged to be contriving new forms of ſacrifice and new modes of expiation; that we are no longer in dread of the caſual neglect or imperfect obſervance of numberleſs rites and ceremonies; that we do not take every adverſe event that befalls us for the vengeance of an enraged God; that we do not allow ourſelves implicitly to be led by others, but dare to follow our own ſentiments and feelings: for all theſe privileges and bleſſings, we are indebted to the abolition of idolatry, and therefore to chriſtianity. Though many ſuperſtitions may ſtill prevail among chriſtians, and formerly

merly many more than at preſent, yet we, and with us many thouſands of our brethren, are freed from them by the influence of chriſtianity, and therein lie the fruitful means for the total eradication of it from among its confeſſors; means which are continually coming forth into practice, and allow us to hope for the moſt glorious effects.

And how much is the knowledge of this only true God, and his relationſhip to us, advanced and extended among mankind by the doctrines of chriſtianity! Every chriſtian, that is not completely ignorant, confeſſes and reveres the true God, not as a being who, infinitely exalted above him, ſtands in no kind of connection with him; but knows and reveres him as his Creator and Preſerver, as his Father and Benefactor, as the Ruler and Judge of the world, as the Obſerver and Rewarder of human actions. And how prolific muſt this conception

tion be among chriſtians, who reflect more attentively upon it! how muſt it furniſh them with the ſolution of a thouſand things which were before inexplicable myſteries to them! They diſcover traces of the wiſdom, the power, and the goodneſs of this God, wherever they turn; they ſee him every where acting for the benefit of all living creatures, and for their own; all things lead them back to him; and the thought of him ſpreads light, and life, and joy, over the whole face of nature.

Certainly the repreſentations of what God is, of his perfections, and eſpecially of what he is in regard to us, are, generally ſpeaking, even among perſons of the inferior ſtations in life, more juſt, more ſatisfactory, and more adapted to promote virtue and happineſs, than they ever were among the heathen nations, not excepting even the majority of their wiſeſt men, or could be, by their mythology. What low, groſs,

groſs, and contemptible repreſentations did they make of their gods in general, of their diſpoſitions, of their actions, of their pleaſures! what weakneſſes, what paſſions, what iniquities, were not aſcribed to them! and how little was even the father of gods and men, as the Greeks and Romans ſtyled their ſupreme divinity, exempted from them! How much juſter are the notions diffuſed by chriſtianity, on this article, among mankind of every ſtation, of every age, and of every profeſſion! Indeed, even theſe conceptions are very imperfect, and muſt remain ſo, as finite man is not able to comprehend infinity. The beſt conceptions, indeed, of many chriſtians are mixed with various errors. But, with all theſe imperfections and failings, they are ſtill incomparably better and worthier than theirs. What chriſtian, however moderately informed, that does not know and believe that God is the moſt holy, the moſt perfect, the beſt of beings; that he is al-

mighty, all-knowing, and every-where preſent, ſupremely juſt, and ſupremely good; that he cannot do evil, and never tempts any man to wickedneſs; that he loves virtue and integrity above all things; that he abhors every ſpecies of iniquity and ſin; and that there are no better means of pleaſing him, and of ſecuring his favour, than by doing juſtice and loving mercy, and, like him, to promote the good of mankind! And are there not thouſands of men, at preſent among the chriſtians, for one among the heathens, who raiſe themſelves to ſtill higher and more adequate repreſentations of the Deity; who carefully ſeparate every thing that is weak, human, and narrow, from theſe repreſentations; who conſider and revere the Creator as a being aſſimilated with every thing that is great, and good, and beautiful, and perfect, inceſſantly employed in beneficence, willing and effecting nothing but felicity; who is to be won by no outward tokens of reverence,

rence, to be ſoothed by no rites or offerings; who is infinitely ſuperior to all human paſſions, to all the emotions of wrath, or partiality, or revenge; who requires no ſlaviſh dread of him from us, but only filial reverence and love; and who is ſupremely worthy of our moſt ardent adoration, of our ſincereſt affection, of our moſt chearful obedience, and our firmeſt confidence!

Add to this, proper knowledge of God, the general and firm belief of our immortality, and the future remuneration, which chriſtianity, wherever it has been preached and received, has ſo deeply imprinted on the hearts of men, and ſo intimately interwoven with their whole courſe of reflection, that even the moſt violent attacks of infidelity cannot, with the generality, eradicate or weaken it. Conſider, likewiſe, that this belief inculcates ſuch an immortality, and ſuch a remuneration, as is conſequent upon

the moral conduct of men in this life, on their virtues and their vices; and conclude, from thence, how favourable this faith muſt, generally ſpeaking, be to the amendment and repoſe of mankind, and how much more force it muſt have to this effect than the dark, uncertain, doubtful, falſe, and immoral ſignifications of this doctrine which obtained in the heathen world, and which, as it appears, were not much regarded by ordinary perſons, and were looked upon by the wiſe as difficult and inexplicable problems.

A ſecond claſs of general advantages, for which our thanks are due to chriſtianity, relates to human virtue and integrity. Theſe, upon the whole, have likewiſe greatly gained thereby. Notions of virtue are, in general, more juſtly framed among chriſtians than they were among the heathens. Every one knows, that eſſential virtue conſiſts neither in bodily ſtrength, nor

nor in the valour that braves all dangers; neither in courage nor intrepidity in war, nor in the great atchievements of heroes and conquerors, commonly as deſtructive as renowned. Every one knows that it does not conſiſt merely in abſtinence from groſs and flagrant violations of order, or in particular actions, though juſt and good; but that it comprehends the whole turn of mind, and the whole ſeries of conduct; that it is expreſſive of our intire moral perfection; that we are virtuous, when we are and do all that we can be and do, according to our abilities, our vocation, and our circumſtances, when our ſentiments and behaviour are regulated by the will of God and the injunctions of his laws. It is known and received as a general principle, that real virtue conſiſts not in the attachment and affection to certain perſons, or to a particular nation, founded on contempt and hatred towards the whole human race, but in an enlarged deſire, and ſtrenuous endea-

vours, to promote the happineſs of all mankind. And how much more adapted is this conception of it, for which we are chiefly indebted to chriſtianity, to further and confirm the tranquillity, the ſecurity, and the welfare of human ſociety, than that barbarous patriotic virtue, as it was called, ſo much accounted of in the old heathen world, and which is ſtill ſo often extolled by partial judges, to the detriment of chriſtian virtue! But particularly the ſilent and domeſtic virtues, the virtues of common life, whoſe beneficial influence on the public welfare is ſo various and laſting, have acquired a greater dignity by chriſtianity; they have obtained the ſo much merited, but formerly ſo much undiſcovered, preference to the boaſted heroic virtues, which, for the moſt part, were founded on injuſtice and violence.

The doctrine of virtue, among chriſtians, is cloſely connected with the doctrine of God

God and religion, and is therefore to every man, and eſpecially to the inferior claſſes of mankind, much plainer, much more fixed, and much more forcible, than it could poſſibly be among the heathens. Among them, religion and virtue were two diſtinct things, not connected together; nay, frequently in direct oppoſition to each other. The heathens, that is, particular perſons, or ſome ſages among them, had a morality; but heatheniſm, or the heatheniſh religion, had none. Morals, therefore, reſted intirely either on the natural ſentiment of the difference between good and evil, which was debilitated and almoſt deſtroyed; or on philoſophical inveſtigations of the nature and connections of man and the material world, totally above the comprehenſion of the generality of their fellow citizens. Chriſtianity, as well as Socrates, but in a far loftier ſenſe, and in a much more general and effectual manner, has brought down true wiſdom from heaven to the earth—

has reduced it to the underſtanding and the heart of every man—has drawn it from the ſchools of the learned, mixed it with common life, and, by uniting religion and morality together, has rendered eaſy and important the knowledge of our nature and the practice of our duties.

How many motives, how many incitements to integrity and virtue, does this happy junction of morality with religion put the chriſtian in poſſeſſion of, who is not totally ignorant or inattentive! He cannot avoid making ſuch reflections as theſe on a thouſand occaſions: God, my Creator and Preſerver, my Benefactor, and my Judge, requires me to do this, and to abſtain from the other. This he hath expreſsly commanded me; that he hath as expreſsly forbidden. If I do the one, he will bleſs and reward me; if I do not abſtain from the other, he will call me to account, and the conſequence will be fatal. My life

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and my fortunes are both in his hand; both are dependant on his grace and favour; without them I cannot hope for ſucceſs, and nothing can ſhield me from the effects of his diſpleaſure. From how many irregularities muſt theſe reflections not reſtrain him, though they ſhould not be altogether juſt! though they ſhould be accompanied by many erroneous conceptions! and to how many proper, good, and generous actions muſt they not incite him! how much muſt conſcientiouſneſs, integrity, and fidelity in ſecret, be promoted thereby!

Both hiſtory and experience uniformly confirm theſe good effects of chriſtianity, in regard to the moral conduct of mankind. It is not to be denied, that many unnatural and deſtructive vices, which heatheniſm tolerated and favoured, are now, even in places where, by means of the chriſtian doctrine, they are not intirely eradicated from

from amongſt its confeſſors, are now branded with ſo much infamy and diſgrace, that they are no longer allowed to be named. It is not to be denied, that, on the whole, more integrity and honour, more fidelity and confidence in commerce, and all dealings between man and man, prevail among chriſtians than amongſt the moſt poliſhed nations that are not chriſtians. It is not to be denied, that the ſentiments of general philanthropy and beneficence, and the indications of them, are far more frequent and effective among them than ever they were among the heathens. The eſtabliſhment and ſupport of ſo many hoſpitals, ſo many inſtitutions for the maintenance of orphans, for the comfort of the poor and the ſick, of which we find ſcarcely any traces among the heathens, are ſpeaking examples of it. In general, without partiality, we have a perfect right to maintain, that among chriſtian nations, taken at large, the knowledge of duty and virtue, a hatred

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of wickedneſs, and a love of goodneſs, and therefore their morality, is greater and more general, the reverence for the Deity and his laws more operative, the conſciences of men more tender and delicate, and, in particular, the mild and ſocial virtues are far more common than they ever were among the people of any nation, that we know of, before the coming of Chriſt.

A third claſs of general advantages, for which we are indebted to chriſtianity, comprehends the tranquillizing of the human mind, and the fixing of their hopes. How conſiderably have theſe, which are ſuch eſſential parts of chriſtianity, been gainers by its peculiar doctrines of Providence, and the Divine Government of the world, and the forgiveneſs of ſins, of the immortality of the ſoul, and of the life to come! The heathen, at leaſt, among the Greeks and Romans, regarded his divinities either as idle beings, totally unconcerned about the affairs

affairs of mortals, or as ſelfiſh, partial, and capricious, eaſy to be provoked, and hard to be appeaſed. He knew not what affinity he had to them, and what he was to fear from their diſpleaſure, or to expect from their favour. He muſt conſole himſelf with the abſolute neceſſity of gods and men, with a blind and inflexible fate. On the other hand, the chriſtian, the unlearned as well as the learned, the pooreſt day-labourer as well as the exalted amongſt the people, the chriſtian is acquainted with truths which have quite a different influence on the repoſe of his mind. There is, thus can he reflect on all occaſions, and thus does he in fact very often think—There is a Being ſupremely wiſe, and ſupremely good, who is intereſted about us all, whoſe creatures and children we are, who loves and provides for us all. Nothing can happen without his will; and God, the All-merciful, wills ever the beſt. Nothing is impoſſible to him; he knows how to deliver

ver from death. To them that love him, all things muſt produce advantage. If he be for us, none can be againſt us. His power is mighty in weakneſs. He will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able to bear. How much do theſe and the like reflections lighten the hardeſt toils, alleviate the greateſt indigence, and mitigate the ſevereſt afflictions, to many thouſands of chriſtians! How much courage and confidence do they give them in misfortunes and perils! If we frequented the cottages of the poor, the dwellings of the lower claſſes of men, and made ourſelves acquainted with their habitual manner of thinking, we ſhould be convinced how much comfort and tranquillity the chriſtian doctrine affords them all, almoſt without exception, as they receive and believe it in ſimplicity of heart; and are thereby free from all the doubts with which the wiſe, as they are called, are perpetually tormented; intirely repoſing on what the ſcripture

ture tells them, and conſtantly ſuppoſing God particularly employed in their concerns, and in the diſpoſition of their fortunes; and then we ſhall rightly judge of the advantage the chriſtians muſt have, in this reſpect likewiſe, over all the moſt civilized nations that were or are not chriſtian.

How much more eaſily may the chriſtian, oppreſſed by the ſenſe of his ſins and the terror of puniſhment, quiet his mind hereupon, than any other man who finds himſelf in the ſame ſituation, but knows not the chriſtian doctrine! The chriſtian knows, and knows it with aſſurance, that God is inclined to pity, and to ſpare; that he will forgive the contrite and converted ſinner all his delinquencies without exception, and remit the penalty due to tranſgreſſion. He knows, and knows with certainty, what, in this reſpect, he has to do: he has no need to conſider, with anxious uncertainty, what multitudes of offerings, what

what coſtly preſents, what myſtical atonements and expiations, will procure his pardon, or what ſeverities of penance; but ſo ſoon as he draws nigh to his Creator and Judge with an upright heart, abhors and forſakes his wicked habits, and, effectually determined on a better conduct, holds true to his purpoſe, he may immediately promiſe himſelf the favour of the Moſt High, and his heart condemns him no more. What a healing and reviving balm muſt theſe chriſtian doctrines have poured into the wounded conſciences and tortured hearts of thouſands and thouſands, who muſt otherwiſe have become a prey to the horrors of deſpair!

We may advance the ſame thing in regard to the dread of death, and the hope of a better life. Though the ſage of heatheniſm, with a perplexed and doubting ſpirit, or in the gloomy expectation of utter extinction, ſaw death approach him; though

though the greateſt number of them met this ghaſtly tyrant either with a reckleſs inſenſibility, or with a ſpirit ſtruggling between darkneſs and light, between fear and hope; yet chriſtians, in general, being firmly perſuaded of their immortality, and the eternal life that awaits them after death, form juſter conceptions of the future ſtate, can more eaſily, and with greater certainty, promiſe themſelves a better portion there than they have had on earth; meet their diſſolution, therefore, with far greater calmneſs and comfort; and many thouſands of them actually tread the path of death without diſmay, and in the joyous, indubitable expectation of an everlaſting continuation of exiſtence, a glorious, interminable, and ever-increaſing felicity: infallible arguments, that leave us no room to doubt that there not only may be, but that there actually is, among chriſtians, far more comfort and hope than was ever to be found among the heathens.

Recollect,

Recollect, at the ſame time, for we cannot here finiſh the ſubject, recollect the multitudes of inſtitutions and means for promoting knowledge, virtue, and the peace of mankind, that owe their origin to chriſtianity.

Think on the numerous ſchools, erected in all the towns and moſt of the villages in chriſtian countries, and which, conſidered as ſchools of religion and morality, were wholly unknown among the heathens, at leaſt among the Greeks and Romans, and likewiſe among our anceſtors, the antient inhabitants of our iſland. Defective and illiberal as the generality of theſe ſchools, in more than one reſpect, may be, yet children are there brought to the knowledge of the only true God, and diſciplined in his fear, inſtructed in their duties, cautioned againſt all ſinfulneſs and vice, and incited to virtue by various ways.

Reflect on the paſtoral office every where introduced into the chriſtian church, devoted to the inſtruction, the encouragement, and the comfort of individuals of every condition, age, and ſex; an inſtitution peculiar in its kind, and which certainly a Socrates, a Plato, a Cicero, and a Confucius, would have admired as the moſt excellent and beneficial of all others, if they could have ſeen it in their days. Let this appointment be ever ſo much abuſed, let the delivery of the chriſtian doctrines be never ſo faulty; yet the conveyance of inſtruction in the moſt important doctrines of religion and virtue, in ſo public a manner, in ſuch frequent returns, and often with the moſt intimate ſenſation and conviction, muſt infinitely more contribute to the amelioration and repoſe of mankind than all the ſolemnities and ceremonies of the heathens were ever able to do. Take this likewiſe into the account, that all theſe advantages, inſti-

tutions,

tutions, and eſtabliſhments, are ſo conſtituted in the very nature of them, that they cannot fail, by degrees, of becoming common, and of obtaining a certain degree of perfection and actual influence; and that they are even now becoming conſtantly, and with no ſlow progreſſion, more perfect and productive than they have hitherto been: and thus it is an undeniable truth, that we, and all mankind in general, are under no ordinary obligation to chriſtianity.

There are ſtill a variety of other conſiderable advantages for which we ſtand indebted to the influence of this heavenly doctrine, and which relate in great meaſure to the outward condition of man. We muſt now, however, confine ourſelves to a ſlight indication of them: that polygamy, for example, that fertile ſource of depopulation, of effeminacy and domeſtic miſery, is aboliſhed; that the inhuman, barbarous cuſtom of expoſing children, on

account of ſome accidental infirmity, or becauſe they were diſagreeable or burdenſome to their parents, and giving them up to unavoidable ruin, is abhorred by all men; that ſlavery, that unjuſtifiable degradation of human nature, as it formerly obtained among the Greeks and Romans, and other nations of antiquity, is, at leaſt in chriſtian Europe, much diminiſhed; that, by the ſtrenuous exertions of generous and noble-minded men, we may entertain the pleaſing hope that it will, ere long, be held in equal deteſtation by the inhabitants of the different provinces in America as it is with us; that laws and cuſtoms, with all their allowed imperfections and inconſiſtences, are ſtill, in general, milder and more humane; that war, in many reſpects, is carried on with leſs cruelty and devaſtation; that the conquered are ſpared, and neither deprived of their lives nor their liberty; that the ſentiment of the moral dignity of man, the acknowledgement of the natural

equality of the human race, and a due regard for each other among individuals, are underſtood and felt, and are every day becoming more univerſal and effective; that many corrupt paſſions, deſtructive to ſociety, as revenge, ambition, tyranny, are reſtrained to narrower bounds, and meet with more powerful controul, or are directed to a nobler channel: for all theſe advantages we are indebted, though indeed not altogether and alone, but in a great meaſure, to chriſtianity, and its influence on the general opinion and manners of its confeſſors; and ſurely the peace, the ſecurity, the welfare of ſocial life, muſt be much improved thereby.

So many, ſuch great advantages, in reſpect to knowledge, to virtue and integrity, to our tranquillity and hopes, and our external welfare, do we owe to the doctrine of Jeſus, whoſe appearance in the world we this day commemorate. And muſt not the

conſideration of theſe advantages, which we all poſſeſs and enjoy, inſpire us with gladneſs at our felicity, and with gratitude to God, the Author and Giver of it? Yes, chriſtian feſtivals are real days of rejoicing, but with a joy that relates particularly to the bounty of God, our Father in heaven, who allows us to feel the whole worth of his parental protection and love, and impreſſes our hearts with gratitude towards him. Let us, then, excite theſe joys within us, and endeavour to render them poignant and lively by reflection. To this end, let us tranſport ourſelves, in ſpirit, into the times of heatheniſm, viſit the temple of the gods, repreſent to ourſelves the frivolous worſhip their adorers paid them, and the ſuperſtitious terrors that ſurrounded theſe abodes of impoſture; let us lament over the far greater ignorance, wickedneſs, and comfortleſs condition, that formerly prevailed among mankind; let us bewail the miſerable fate of the nations, who blind-

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ly followed their ſightleſs guides, who proſtrated themſelves before wood and ſtone; who lived, as it were, without God, and without hope, in the world, and among whom alſo our forefathers were; and then compare our happier condition with theirs, and render due honour to chriſtianity, by which this beneficial revolution was brought about.

Or, if we cannot make this compariſon, from a deficiency of hiſtorical information, we need not go ſo far from our own times, and from the preſent prevailing ſentiments; let us, however, at leaſt, reflect what condition our knowledge, our virtue, our hope, our outward welfare, the ſecurity and peace of ſociety, would be in, had we been bereaved of the advantage we have now conſidered as the fruit of chriſtianity. In all probability, we ſhould then have lain buried in the thickeſt darkneſs of ignorance and ſuperſtition; we ſhould

have been blind idolaters, miſerable ſlaves, dupes or impoſtors, the ſport of our propenſities and paſſions; fearful, hopeleſs, wretched mortals. Now are we children of light; men who know their Creator, their duties, and the end of their creation; worſhipers of the true God, comforted by his providence, by his grace, by the expectation of a better and an eternal life; members of a civilized ſociety, where vice is deteſted, where virtue is eſteemed and prized; where, upon the whole, much integrity, much philanthropy, much truth and confidence, is actually to be found. How happy, then, is it for us that Jeſus appeared on the earth, and promulgated his doctrine! What thanks do we owe to him and his heavenly Father, who gave him to us for our teacher and deliverer!

And how much happier may we ſtill become, by employing his doctrine aright! We muſt not be ſatisfied with the general advan-

advantages to all nations and languages. We muſt ſtrive to reach the higheſt perfection and happineſs, to which it is adapted to lead us. We muſt, therefore, continually improve in the knowledge of this excellent doctrine; apply it more ſedulouſly to ourſelves; allow ourſelves to be more and more animated by its ſpirit, and ſtudy to think and live in a more chriſtian manner. We muſt follow its directions, to the obtaining of felicity, with a chearful and intire dedition of our hearts, and obſerve all its precepts with unremitted attention. Thus ſhall we endeavour to become, by its means, intirely free, thoroughly wiſe, and perfectly virtuous, perfectly and eternally bleſſed!

Chriſtmas-day,
1787.

ESTI-

ESTIMATE XVII.

THE VALUE OF THE HUMAN SOUL.

We are the offspring of God.

Acts xvii. 29.

THE VALUE OF THE HUMAN SOUL.

RIGHTLY to fix the value of things, not to ſet more by them, and not to beſtow on them a greater degree of affection than they deſerve; to connect the preſent with the future, and, in drawing our concluſions, to look not only at the former but alſo at the latter; never to loſe ſight of our grand deſign, and to regard and uſe all other things only as means to the advancement of it: this is the character of the wiſe and prudent. To judge of externals by the firſt impreſſion they make on our ſenſes, which is often a very fallacious one;

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to treat empty trifles as matters of great moment, and important affairs as contemptible trifles; to follow blind inſtincts, or corrupted paſſions, in the choice of the objects of our love and eſteem; to ſacrifice a great future fortune to a preſent momentary pleaſure, or tranſient advantage; to take the means for the end, or to live in the world without a determinate plan upon a bare capital: this is the character of a fool. But who is that ſage, if it be not the chriſtian, who thinks and acts conformably to his heavenly calling? Who is this fool, if it be not the ſenſual man, who follows his inordinate deſires, and loſes heaven for the goods of the earth? The former, the true chriſtian, holds all that is terreſtrial and tranſient for what it actually is, and will hereafter be; and this moderates his affection towards it, and renders the loſs of it by no means intolerable: the latter, the mere ſenſnal man, ſeeks his whole happineſs in earthly things; and, if they

they chance to be raviſhed from him, he thinks himſelf caſt into the loweſt depth of miſery, as indeed he is, ſince he has nothing left to compenſate the loſs. The former directs his deſires to the worthieſt things; his whole heart is devoted to God and religion, to virtue and friendſhip: the latter beſtows his whole love and eſteem on ſuch things as are unworthy of them, and hoſtile to his vocation. The former knows that he has an immortal ſpirit, and all his endeavours tend to render that nobler part of his being more perfect, and more fitted for that ſublimer ſtate he is haſtening to enter: the latter forgets, as it were, that he has a reaſonable ſoul, that is to live for ever, and confines his cares to his outward condition, and to that which flatters his ſenſes. The former lives for eternity, and conſiders his proceedings here as preparatory to it: the latter limits all his reflections, deſires, and views to the ſhort moment of his earthly pilgrimage, and loſes

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ſight of the term to which it leads. After this contraſt of the temper and conduct of the true chriſtian, with the temper and conduct of the diſorderly man, can we for a moment doubt that the former purſues the dictates of wiſdom, and that the latter betrays the greateſt folly? Whence, however, proceeds this difference in their character and conduct? The chriſtian underſtands and feels the whole value, the high dignity, the important appointment of his ſoul; he frequently reflects upon it; he compares what he is, and does, impartially with what he ought to be, and to do; and ſtrives to conduct himſelf according to his knowledge. The other, on the contrary, allows all this to eſcape him, and judges and acts, in the generality, and the moſt important of caſes, as if he belonged to an inferior order of beings. Of ſo much conſequence is it, that we ſhould frame to ourſelves right notions of the value and excellency of our ſoul, and that theſe notions

tions ſhould have an effective influence on our conduct. To this end, let us conſider the high value, the excellency and dignity of the human ſoul: but let us, likewiſe, attend to the behaviour that is fitting for ſuch noble, ſuch highly favoured creatures as we are. Theſe two conſiderations compoſe the matter of my preſent attempt, and they are certainly of a nature to merit your utmoſt attention.

The nature and origin of the human ſoul, its great capacities and powers; what God has done, and ſtill continues to do for its preſervation, and the advancement of its happineſs; its appointment, and its future lot: all theſe proclaim it of exalted worth, and ſet it beyond all doubt to reflecting creatures.

How lofty is the origin of the human ſoul! How far, in this reſpect, does it excel the body! This is formed of the duſt:

it is produced by generation. It lies concealed in other terreſtrial bodies, and its developement is occaſioned by mortal man. The ſoul, as the Scripture ſays, is of divine deſcent, is the offspring of God. God is, in a peculiar ſenſe, her Creator and Father, as he is the Creator and Father of ſuperior ſpirits: ſhe is, therefore, related to thoſe exalted beings. Yes, ſhe bears the impreſs of him that made her; and even the ſtate of meanneſs, and of moral corruption, wherein ſhe is at preſent, cannot totally efface the glorious reſemblance. Her reaſon is a ray of his unbounded intellect; her freedom and power is derived from his unlimited and conſtantly efficient might; her love to what is beautiful and good, to order and perfection, her friendly and beneficent emotions, are emanations of his pure holineſs, of his eternal and unalterable benignity.

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Her ſpiritual nature, raiſed ſo far above all that we diſcern about us, and in connection with us, bears witneſs alſo of its excellency, and of her high deſcent. She tells us expreſsly that ſhe is not of the earth, but that ſhe came from heaven. Had we already no plain and clear conception of the nature of our ſoul, ſhould we ſay, that, as far as we could diſcover, ſhe is a ſimple eſſence, it would be much the ſame as ſaying that ſhe is, not like matter compoſed of parts: then our reflection, as well as our feeling, would inform us that ſhe is ſomewhat wholly different from the body ſhe inhabits, and is far more excellent than it. The body continues not a ſingle moment in the ſame ſtate in which it was before. It is continually undergoing various alterations, which, imperceptible as in part they may be, yet, taken together, are very conſiderable. It is conſtantly loſing numberleſs little particles, which are as conſtantly, by means of air, of food, and

drink, replaced by others; and thus, in the courſe of a few years, our body is, as it were, totally renewed. But, amidſt all theſe revolutions of its groſſer ſhell, the ſoul remains invariably the ſame. She is conſcious, at every period of time, that ſhe is exactly what ſhe was in any previous portion of her life. She can connect the paſt, the preſent, and the future together, though the paſt be long ſince paſt, and for the future there be no reaſon diſcoverable in the material world. She begets reflection, ſhe makes concluſions, ſhe exhibits powers, which not only have nothing ſimilar to what we term magnitude, figure, ſolidity, and movement, but are contradictory to all theſe properties of matter. All her ideas, diverſified and numberleſs as they may be, concentrate themſelves, as it were, in one point, which we muſt neceſſarily repreſent as indiviſible. She is therefore of a quite different, of a far more permanent and unchangeable nature than our body,

body, and all the other things that fall under the perception of our ſenſes.

Hence likewiſe it is, that the well-being of the ſoul depends not ſo much on the outward circumſtances in which ſhe finds herſelf, as on her own moral frame: ſo as that ſhe may be wretched in the poſſeſſion of the moſt brilliant advantages of life, and be ſad amidſt the free uſe of all the ſources of joy that human ſociety can open, if error, paſſion, and vice, ſhed darkneſs and diſmay upon her: ſo can ſhe, likewiſe, be contented in the want of all the goods of fortune, and comforted under the burden of ſevere afflictions, if the knowledge of truth, the conſciouſneſs of innocence, the ſentiment of her dignity, and the proſpect of the future world, inſpire her with light and reſt, with hope and aſſurance. She can maintain her nobility in the loweſt ſtation, her freedom in the bonds of ſlavery, her brightneſs at the ſight of death and

corruption: ſhe can preſerve her virtue under all temptations, her fortitude in all dangers, and her greatneſs under all oppreſſions. She ſoars above every thing earthly and viſible; preſſes by meditation into the very abode of the perfected juſt; gets a foretaſte of their purer joys, and looks down from this eminence on all that is tranſient and vain with compaſſion and contempt. Her perfection and happineſs repoſe on ſuch properties, views, ſenſations, and aptitudes, as no changes of fortune can affect; which ſhe cannot loſe, though heaven and earth ſhould paſs away. How excellent, then, muſt be the nature of the human ſoul! how valuable muſt theſe advantages render it, beyond all that is material!

Caſt, ſecondly, a look at her capacities and powers, and you will ſtill plainer perceive her excellency, and her value. How noble is the employment of the human mind!

mind! how great the perfection of which it is ſuſceptible! how many great and aſtoniſhing things is man able to execute with it! he thinks, and is conſcious of it. He forms to himſelf clear repreſentations of the things that are without him, and can increaſe the number of theſe images without end. He compares his ideas with one another, judges of their harmony or their contradiction, and combines them in thouſands of various ways. He proceeds from known things to unknown, from the eaſy to the difficult; adopts principles, draws concluſions, concatenates theſe concluſions together, and is ever opening new proſpects in the unlimited regions of truth that lies before him. Would he diſmiſs his ideas, they fly from his preſence: are they obſcure, he ſpreads a new light upon them: are they vaniſhed away, he calls them back. With his underſtanding, man retraces his own capacities and powers, and obſerves the riſe, the progreſs, and the varied com-

bination of his reflections, his propenſities, and his deſires. By means of his underſtanding, man rules over all the creatures of the earth; knows how to reſtrain their ſtrength, and over-rule their ſubtlety, by prudence, and to facilitate by their ſervice the moſt difficult taſks; and the whole inanimate and irrational creation is rendered ſubſervient to his profit and pleaſure. By his underſtanding, when Providence has allotted him an exalted ſtation among his brethren, he comprehends the multifarious and complicated concerns of intire kingdoms and ſtates; judges of the ſtrength and the weakneſs of every particular diſtrict, and of his affinity to the whole; is vigilant and provident for the benefit of all; knows how to connect the moſt different capacities, the moſt oppoſite inclinations, deſigns, and motions of his ſubjects with each other, to keep them in their due equilibrium, and to turn them all to the advancement of one and the ſame great end;

end; enlightens and animates millions of men by the radiance he diffuſes around him, and governs them ſo, that, in their ſovereign, they revere the kindeſt of fathers. He proceeds ſtill farther with his intellect: by unremitted reflection, and by the help of a reſearching mind, he dives into the ſecrets of nature; penetrates the latent cauſes, properties, and effects of things; ſees and admires the wiſdom and art diſcernible in the ſmalleſt inſect no leſs than in the ſtructure of the world, and, from obſervations of what are in and for themſelves apparently of little import, diſcovers the univerſal law by which the largeſt of the heaveuly bodies roll. With his underſtanding man lifts himſelf from earth to heaven, paſſes the orbs and the diſtances of the ſtars, arranges them in claſſes, adjuſts their dimenſions, weighs their ſolidity, and ſeeks and finds the place where they have ſtood for thouſands of years, and where they may ſtand for ages

to

to come. Nay, with his underſtanding man ſoars to the knowledge of the Great Firſt Cauſe of all things, to the knowledge of him who is the Creator and Lord of him and the univerſe, who is Beauty and Perfection itſelf, before whoſe grandeur and glory ſuns and worlds are nothing. Even the infinite attributes of this moſt Exalted Being are not abſolutely hidden from him: he ſees them reſplendent in all his works, and ſtudies his eternal will from the conſtitutions and arrangements he has eſtabliſhed in nature.

And who can ſettle the boundaries of the imagination and memory of the human ſoul! The former traverſes the immenſe region of creation, far ſwifter than light; ranges from one ſolar, from one planetary ſyſtem to another; forms new worlds to itſelf; connects the paſt with the preſent, and pierces to the remoteſt futurity: the latter, the memory, can reſtore to its priſ-

tine

cine diſpoſition and arrangement all that we have ever felt, all that we have ever thought, and of which no trace remains without us; it can ſtore up unnumbered ideas of the moſt diſſimilar things, without confuſion or mixture, for our future uſe; it can contain, within itſelf, the whole circle of arts and ſciences, all that ancient and modern hiſtory comprehends of remarkable tranſactions, of the inventions and diſcoveries of mankind, ever augmenting this enormous ſtock of knowledge, and at all times delivering to us whatever is beſt adapted to our preſe n purpoſe.

With what faculties, farther, is the human ſoul endowed! The faculty by which, of its mere will, not as an effect of a natural and irreſiſtible inſtinct, but from free choice, with complete conſciouſneſs, and to wiſely directed ainis, the moſt diverſified movements in our body, and by means whereof

whereof a thouſand revolutions, in the objects without us, inſtantaneouſly and infallibly take place, and at the command whereof as ſuddenly and certainly ceaſe: this power is an image of the Omnipotence that calls that which is not into being, and orders that to paſs away which is to exiſt no more. It is a power that we know not how to explain, but which undoubtedly has ſomething godlike in it, and exalts man far above the inanimate and the irrational creation; a faculty that, likewiſe, muſt have a great and beneficial influence on our moral conduct, if we ſtudied to exert it with greater conſideration, and learnt to apply it aright.

In ſhort, how far may it not carry the human ſoul in moral perfection! She is not neceſſitated to follow a blind and irreſiſtible inſtinct: ſhe determines herſelf· ſhe acts from diſcernment and free election, by knowledge and argument. She knows the

the ſemblances of good and evil from what is actually ſo, and how to diſtinguiſh them apart; and how to bring the remoteſt conſequences of things into conſideration, when needful to her in drawing her concluſions. She is ſuſceptible of the nobleſt ſentiments, and capable of the moſt magnanimous actions. Has the deſire of pleaſing God, and of accompliſhing his will, has the love of truth and virtue, once got the aſcendency in her, then may ſhe withſtand and repel the ſtrongeſt incitements to ſin, either outward or inward. She can chearfully ſacrifice either renown or might, either riches or honour, either quiet or fortune, either health or life, to her duty. To reſemble God, her heavenly Father, in juſtice and beneficence, to copy him ever more cloſely, and to render herſelf ever more capable of nearer communion with him, is the ultimate object of her endeavours and deſires. This exalted aim ſhe purſues with an undeviating ardour; readily renounces every

every thing that would turn her aſide; becomes conſtantly wiſer and better, and never ceaſes from ſtriving after higher degrees of perfection. What a value, what a dignity muſt the human ſoul poſſeſs, adorned as ſhe is with ſuch capacities and powers, and capable of ſuch a high degree, of ſo inceſſant an elevation of knowledge and virtue!

It is true, that even the human ſoul, from whoſe capacities and powers we conclude of her excellence, has likewiſe her weak ſide; and were I to deny it, or endeavour to hide it from you, the experience of all mankind, of every age, would charge me with falſhood and inſincerity. Yes, we all but too frequently experience how eaſily our ſoul faints under the preſſure of intenſe application; how ſuddenly ſhe is precipitated from the heights to which ſhe had climbed, and how often ſhe fatigues herſelf in vain to ſcan and explore them. We all

all but too much experience how eaſily we are ſeduced into error, how quickly we ſuffer ourſelves to be hurried away by violent paſſions; how often we accept the ſemblance of a matter for its actual ſubſtance; and how difficult it is for us to regain the path of truth and virtue, when once we have deviated from it. All of us experience but too much, that, at preſent, we are ſtill ſurrounded by great darkneſs and uncertainty; that our knowledge is but imperfect; that, in moſt of our aims, we walk by faith, and not by ſight; and that, in fine, the nobleſt capacities of our nature can only be carried to a certain degree of perfection on earth, by the ſmalleſt proportion of mankind. But be upon your guard, that, from theſe experiences, you draw no concluſions detrimental to the value and dignity of the human ſoul. Conſider under what adverſe circumſtances ſhe lives and acts in this world. Conſider how much ſhe is oppreſſed by the corruption of ſin; how

how much ſhe is confined by the irregularities and infirmities of the body; how much ſhe is moleſted and impeded in her functions by the wants and affairs of this life, which demand the greateſt part of our time, and the principal exertions of our powers; and how often her fire is even repreſſed in education; and repreſent to yourſelves what ſhe will be, when theſe circumſtances ſhall be changed, theſe impediments removed, and ſhe finds herſelf in another and a better world. Then will ſhe firſt ſhew herſelf in her intire vigour, and, if we at preſent pay a becoming attention to her illuminations and ſalvation, will proceed with haſty ſteps from one degree of perfection to another. Here, according to the wiſe conſtitution that God has ſettled, ſhe neither can nor ought to be ſo perfect as by her nature ſhe is adapted to become; and hereby ſhe loſes no more of her worth and excellency, than the diamond loſes of its intrinſic value by not being cut and poliſhed.

But,

But, it may be ſaid, what are theſe faculties and powers of the human ſoul, let them be as great as they may, when compared with the powers and faculties of ſuperior Beings? Indeed, my pious hearer, when I conſider the immeaſurable magnitude of the univerſe; when I reflect how probable it is, that we occupy but one of the loweſt places among the intelligent creatures of God; when I ruminate on the diſtance between mankind and the higheſt order of ſpirits, which may be as great, and probably much greater than the diſtance between the acuteſt human mind and that of the ſimpleſt infant; at ſuch times I am loſt in my own reflections; it then appears to me as if the aſcribing of ſuch value to the human ſoul as I am uſed to give it, were nothing more than a ſuggeſtion of over-weening pride. In thoſe moments comes Jeſus to my aid. He teaches me what God, the Creator of ſpirits, has done for the human ſoul; and this frees

me from all doubt that it muſt have a great value in his ſight, who alone can infallibly judge of the value of things. I ſhall not, at preſent, obſerve how much the wiſdom and goodneſs of God is revealed in the ſtructure of the body which the ſoul inhabits; how curiouſly all the properties and parts of it are adapted to its inſtruction; and how plainly all the methods of his providence tend to the advancement of its perfection. I ſhall only now remind you of the divine information we acquire by the goſpel of Chriſt. What we learn therein of the love of God towards man muſt neceſſarily confer upon our nature a quite peculiar, an inexpreſſible dignity. Yes, when I contemplate that love as the love of a father for his children, that it has ordained us to the greateſt felicity, I can no longer doubt that the human ſoul is precious in his ſight. Then every heſitation ariſing from my reflections on the immenſity of the kingdom of God, on the countleſs

leſs multitude of his adorers, and on the inconſiderable ſtation I fill amongſt them, vaniſhes away from my mind. Then I recover from the illuſion into which the conſideration of his infinite greatneſs, and my own inſignificancy, had thrown me. I am ſenſible to the whole value, the honour, and the felicity of being his child, of bearing his likeneſs, and of being the brother of Jeſus.

Figure to yourſelves, laſtly, from the worth and excellency of your ſouls, what their future appointment and lot muſt be. This reflection muſt already have ariſen in your minds from the foregoing conſiderations, that our ſoul is not, here, what by its nature it may and ought to be; that its capacities and powers are far too great and noble to be completely diſplayed in the preſent ſtate of weakneſs! And may we not thence venture to conclude, that the God who cannot poſſibly fail in his deſigns, and

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who imparts to his creatures no faculty they never can employ, has not formed our ſoul for this terreſtrial ſcene alone, that this is but the firſt and loweſt ſtep in the ſcale of its exiſtence, that it is appointed to a continually advancing, to an eternal elevation? And muſt we not draw this concluſion from what God has done for our ſoul? Would he, who is wiſdom itſelf, who always exactly proportions the means to his ends, would he have made ſuch great preparatives, ſuch diſpoſitions, to our natural and moral perfection, if he had only produced us that we might paſs a few years of more ſenſible than rational life, and then return to nothing? How! God has made me capable of knowing him, of revering him, of loving him, of ſeeking my whole felicity in him; and I am to loſe this capacity, from which I have a right to promiſe myſelf ſo much, which inſpires me with ſo ardent a deſire after a cloſer communion with this glorious Being; I am

to

to loſe it in death! No; God cannot deſtroy creatures whom he has endowed with ſuch faculties, and favoured ſo highly beſides; and, if He cannot deſtroy them, then are they ſafe from all deſtruction. If theſe concluſions, Sirs, be not ſufficiently forcible to convince you of this, then take the inſtructions of chriſtianity thereupon: they chaſe away all darkneſs and uncertainty from over it. Enlightened by the light of chriſtianity, we aſſuredly know that our ſouls ſhall not die, that they ſhall live for ever, that they ſhall exchange this world hereafter for a better. There will they unfold all their faculties and powers, and riſe to the higheſt degree of activity and ſtrength. There will they proceed from one ſtep of knowledge to another, from virtue to ſuperior virtue, from happineſs to ſupreme felicity, and nothing will impede them in their progreſs. Glorious arrangement! happy portion! For ever ſhall we live and act, for ever be more per-

fect and happy, and for ever make nearer approaches to God Moſt High. Then will our nature appear in the full diſplay of its dignity, in all its magnificence and grandeur.

Behold, O man, the nobility of thy origin, the greatneſs of thy capacities! how much God has done for thee! and how exalted thy vocation is! Thy ſoul is of divine deſcent; it is capable of an ever-increaſing perfection; it is of immortal duration. O, praiſe thy Creator! let all that is within thee extol his name! Feel thy worth; forget not thy dignity; learn to prize thyſelf, and think and act in proportion to thy value. Rejoice in thy happineſs, and be always rendering thyſelf more fit for it by wiſdom and virtue. But ſhudder likewiſe at the miſery, at the inconceiveable miſery, of which this natural excellency makes thee ſuſceptible, and ſhun the way that leads thereto, the way of vice, which

which degrades thee, which hurls thee from the throne which thou art ordained to fill, and renders thee a ſlave.

O, how much are ſenſual and earthly-minded men to be pitied, who never riſe above viſible things, never ſeriouſly reflect on the privileges granted them by God, on the perfection and glory to which he has called them; who are inſenſible to their nobleſt powers, or miſapply them to voluptuouſneſs, to unrighteouſneſs, and ſin; who are, as it were, all matter, and think they live for no other purpoſe than to ſatisfy their corporeal wants, to abandon themſelves to ſenſual gratifications, or to accumulate unprofitable treaſures! How can they imagine that, for this end, God has ſo far exalted them above the beaſts of the earth, that to this end he has uſed ſo many extraordinary means for their deliverance, and their ſalvation, or that in theſe purſuits they ſhall reach the end for which they

were created! How can they boaſt of, what is indeed the higheſt boaſt of man, that they are honoured with the image of God, and that they may be conſtantly drawing nearer to this glorious Being, and ever gaining a cloſer reſemblance of him! No; they belye their quality; they debaſe themſelves to an inferior claſs of beings; they defeat the great deſigns their Maker has upon them; they prefer darkneſs to light, ſlavery to freedom, a merely ſenſual and animal life to one that is heavenly and divine. They ſpurn the exalted, the everlaſting felicity of which their nature is capable, from them with contempt. Yet this is not all: they thus are preparing for themſelves puniſhments, which will be ſo much the heavier as the properties are more excellent which God has beſtowed upon them, and which they abuſe. This ye may do, O fooliſh men; ye may weaken, degrade, and diſgrace your ſoul, by folly and vice; ye may render it totally incapable of

of the favour of God, and the bliſs of the future world; ye may beguile it, and hide your ſhame and your miſery from yourſelves; but kill it you cannot: it is immortal: it will live for ever. It will wake from its illuſions in another ſtate; and then will it feel the whole weight of the ſhame and miſery you lay upon it. Then will you experience, to your extreme affright, the truth of what the Saviour ſays, that it will profit a man nothing to have gained the whole world, if he loſe his own ſoul. Lamentable proſpects! dreadful expectations! O ſtrive to put your ſoul into a better frame, ere that great day arrive which ſhall determine your future lot. Raiſe yourſelves from the earth; rend yourſelves from the dominion of ſordid pleaſures. Avail yourſelves of the gracious diſpoſitions God has made, by Chriſt, for the redemption of our ſouls. Seek from him, and his doctrine, that light which can enlighten you, that power which

which can improve and ſanctify you, that comfort which can ſave and bleſs you. Accuſtom yourſelves to conſider and to judge of every thing by its analogy with the futurity that awaits you, and purſue ſuch a courſe as is ſuitable to the excellency of your nature.

Let the conſideration of this excellency of the human ſoul inſtruct and comfort you, ye poor and low among the people, whom neither riches, nor illuſtrious deſcent, nor exalted ſtations, procure any regard. Let it inſpire you, not with pride, but with a generous confidence, a lively ſentiment of your inherent dignity. Let it teach you contentedneſs in your condition. Let theſe conſiderations ſerve as means for ſecuring you from all baſe ſentiments, and all mean behaviour. That which really exalts mankind above the other creatures, what renders them capable of ſuch great perfection and happineſs, is common to you with the mightieſt

mightieſt of the earth, with princes and with kings. If you poſſeſs the eſſential and perdurable privileges of men, how eaſily may you diſpenſe with the things that have more outward ſhew than interior worth, and of which a few years circumſcribe the poſſeſſion! Honour therefore them, who, by an effect of the diverſity of ſtation eſtabliſhed by Providence, are entitled to honour. Be obedient to them who have a right to command you: but both honour and obey, in a manner conſiſtent with the excellency of your nature, generouſly and nobly, not with meanneſs and abject ſervility; and account it no misfortune that you have no ſhare in that ſupremacy and honour. Seek only to embelliſh your ſpirit with knowledge and virtue, to maintain your moral freedom, to renew yourſelves after the likeneſs of God, and to become fitted for a bleſſed immortality; ſo, in whatever condition you are, will you be great and happy,

appy, both in the preſent and in the better world.

And you, who have dominion and authority in your hands, you who, by the ſtation you fill in human ſociety, or by the other advantages that adorn you, are ſo far exalted above your brethren, never forget that thoſe who are beneath you poſſeſs what principally ennobles man, what gives him his greateſt worth, in common with you; that their nature is as excellent as yours; that they have the ſame deſtination with you; and that they are moſtly periſhable and tranſitory things by which you are diſtinguiſhed from them. Beware, then, of conſidering them in a manner as if they were beings of an inferior order to you; and conſtantly reflect, that nothing, abſolutely nothing, can make a man mean and contemptible but folly and vice. Teſtify, much rather, even to the loweſt among mankind, the eſteem and affection that is

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their due as rational and immortal creatures, as children of our univerſal Father in heaven, as co-heirs of your future glory; the regard and love which God and his ſon Jeſus have ſhewn to them, and everlaſtingly will ſhew.

And you all, who bear the name of chriſtians, confeſs likewiſe here the excellency of the gift with which God has favoured you in the chriſtian doctrine. To this doctrine you are chiefly indebted for the knowledge you have of the dignity of your ſpirit, and its high vocation. To this doctrine you are indebted for knowing the means whereby you may maintain this dignity of your ſpirit, and reach the ends of its formation. This divine doctrine has guided us to the way of truth, has removed the grand impediments that might have ſtopped our progreſs on it, and given us both light and force to walk with firmer ſtep the courſe appointed us by heaven.

O, Chriſ-

O, Chriſtians, revere this heavenly doctrine, to which you are ſo much indebted. Beware how you miſuſe this gracious preſent, or apply it only to the adorning of your minds. Let the light, with which it enlightens you, ſtrike into your hearts, ſo as to chear and fertilize them to noble diſpoſitions. Let it not only guide you in diſcerning and judging, but let it direct your inclinations and regulate your conduct. Think and act, at all times, ſo as becomes creatures whoſe origin is ſo illuſtrious, whoſe powers are ſo great, whoſe ordination is ſo glorious. And whenever temptations flatter, whenever the men of this world would ſeduce you to take part in their follies and exceſſes, then let theſe thoughts be preſent to your mind: What! ſhall I debaſe my rational and immortal ſoul? Shall I prefer groſs gratifications to the pure and noble pleaſures of the mind? Shall I, in fooliſh and ſenſual purſuits, plunge from the eminence on which I ſtand,

as

as the image of the Deity, into the mirey pool of wallowing beaſts? Shall I ſurrender, and diſqualify myſelf for, the happineſs to which I am invited in the world to come, that I may enjoy a few fleeting goods and fallacious joys of the preſent, or that I may gratify particular perſons, and purchaſe their favour at the expence of my innocence and peace? No; I will endeavour to maintain the poſt my Creator has aſſigned me, and worthily to employ the talents he has intruſted to my care, that he may intruſt me, as a faithful ſervant, with more hereafter, and requite the uſe he finds agreeable of my faculties and advantages with higher advantages and greater powers. To know him, to converſe with him, to direct my heart and my life by his will, to ſtrengthen in me each beneficent, each friendly propenſity, to become conſtantly wiſer and better, and even now to purſue a heavenly courſe, ſhall be my chief concern, my glory, and

my joy. This ſhall ſupply the want or the loſs of all earthly diſtinctions, tranſport me beyond time and the grave, and lay a firm baſis for my everlaſting perfection and happineſs. And may this be the purpoſe and endeavour of us all! may this be our future portion!

ESTI-

ESTIMATE XVIII.

THE VALUE, OR THE IMPORTANCE, OF THE DOCTRINE OF OUR IMMORTALITY.

If in this life only we have hope in Chriſt, we are of all men moſt miſerable.

1 Cor. xv. 19.

THE VALUE, OR THE IMPORTANCE, OF THE DOCTRINE OF OUR IMMORTALITY.

QUIET and Satisfaction are the great objects of our deſire; and while ſo much pains are taken to acquire them, the more is it to be lamented, that we do not with greater frequency and care make uſe of that principal ſource of true repoſe and ſatisfaction, the hope of a bleſſed immortality. If you fix your thoughts to this earth; if you confine your hopes to

the ſhort moment of this terreſtrial life; if you take this ſtate of diſcipline and exerciſe for the ultimate ſcope of your being; if you regard barely the preſent, and loſe ſight of the future; then it is no wonder if you perceive diſorder, confuſion, and miſery on all ſides around you; it is no wonder that you ſhould be tormented by doubt and perplexity, that you ſeek for the true calm and repoſe of your ſpirit in vain. Only ſoar above that which is viſible and tranſitory; do but raiſe yourſelf in thought to the future world; make yourſelf acquainted with the eternity that awaits you; and the greateſt part of the difficulties that diſturb you will ſoon vaniſh away; you will perceive the wiſeſt arrangement, the moſt admirable beauty in the conſtitution of the world and of your preſent ſtate; you will find ample cauſe for contentment in all circumſtances, and for bearing all the difficulties of this life with firmneſs of mind. The conſiderations with which I mean, at preſent,

preſent, to furniſh your piety, will, I hope and truſt, by the Divine Aſſiſtance, ſhed more light upon the matter.

I ſhall ſhew you the certain hope of a bleſſed immortality as the principal and pureſt ſource of tranquillity and ſatisfaction, and lay before your minds the ineſtimable value of the doctrines and promiſes the goſpel delivers to us, with regard to futurity. And how can I better execute this deſign than by comparing the dark and melancholy life, and the diſmal end of a man without hope, with the bright and chearful life and the comfortable end of a chriſtian, who expects a bleſſed immortality from a confident belief in the aſſurances of the Redeemer! Let us, therefore, ſet theſe two claſſes of men againſt each other, and, by attending them through the principal compartments of their lives, we may perhaps clearly perceive which of them has the advantage of the other.

To the man who knows nothing of futurity, who has no hope of immortality, all nature is a ſealed book, and he is the greateſt of all myſteries to himſelf. The deſign of his exiſtence is incomprehenſible to him; and of the purpoſes for which the other creatures that ſurround him were formed, and which ſo far exceed mankind in number, magnitude, and beauty, he knows ſtill leſs. Every thing he ſees and hears is to him an ænigma, to the ſolution whereof he can find no key. Repreſent to yourſelf a philoſopher, who knows nothing of the goſpel, and from whom futurity is concealed, profoundly contemplating the heaven and the earth, and himſelf, and that you hear him diſcourſe on theſe important objects in his comfortleſs ſolitude: what a doubtful, what a deſultory, and diſmal language he holds! Methinks I hear him exclaim, in a doleful voice, Why is the heaven ſo beautifully adorned, and to what end is this magnificence which nature ſo pro-

profuſely diſplays wherever I turn my view? What is the purpoſe of this great, this immenſe and ingenious ſtructure? How gloomy, how painful to me is this proſpect, ſo charming in itſelf, as I, perhaps now for the laſt time, enjoy it, and at all events ſhall ſhortly be deprived of all ſentiment for ever! Were I ſhut up in ſome dark and diſmal dungeon, had the day never ſhone upon my dwelling, my miſery had then been tolerable: but here, like ſome malefactor, I ſit impriſoned in a gorgeous palace, but can find nothing delightful, nothing agreeable in it, as expecting every moment the ſummons to death! — And what mean the faculties I feel within me? How am I benefited by the capacities I poſſeſs, but which I cannot employ? I behold many beauties, much magnificence, many aſtoniſhing effects before me; I am curious to inveſtigate and underſtand them; but they are all incomprehenſible to me; it is too high for me, I cannot reach it.

My faculties forſake me, and the light itſelf is darkneſs to me.—It is true, nature is beautiful; ſhe is pleaſant and charming; ſhe invites my ſenſes to abundance of pleaſure and joy. But why, then, am I ſo reſtleſs and uneaſy? Why cannot all theſe goods and beauties ſatisfy my ſpirit? Whence proceeds the want I feel amidſt this abundance, and the ſentiment of which ſo often diſturbs my livelieſt pleaſure, and always renders it incomplete? Why is my inquiſitiveneſs never to be ſatisfied? Why do I never ceaſe from wiſhing? Whence comes the diſguſt that ſo quickly ſucceeds to enjoyment, and deprives all I earneſtly longed after, in a moment, of its worth? Has the Creator, then, called me out of nothing for my torment? Has he given me ſuch deſires for the augmentation of my miſery? To what purpoſe ſuch great preparatives for the few and uncertain hours of life?—Thus does the hopeleſs mortal entangle himſelf in reflection. He finds himſelf

himſelf in the moſt delightful garden; but it is all a labyrinth to him, to him it loſes every charm from his want of a clue to guide him through it.

Before the chriſtian, who expects immortality, and an eternity of life to come, all theſe difficulties vaniſh away. He ſees that it is a wiſe and benignant God, who has placed him on the globe of the earth. He diſcovers the principal ſcope of things, and ſets his mind at reſt. The hope of futurity gives every thing, beautiful and great, he ſees in the world, a heightened colour and a new diſplay. The view of the boundleſs creation, that utterly perplexed and confounded yonder unhappy being, inſpires the chriſtian with admiration, and leads him to adore the Moſt High in ſerenity and ſatisfaction. He exclaims, with the author of the Pſalms, "Lord, how glorious are thy works! in wiſdom haſt thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches!"

Here

Here I perceive everlaſting effects; here I find materials for inceſſant diſcovery; here I ſee ſources of knowledge and joy, whence rational beings may draw for ever, without any fear of their failing. How gloomy to me would be the contemplation of beautiful nature! how ſad the ſentiment of my powers! how difficult to aſſuage my thirſt after knowledge! how fertile in vexation my infinite deſires! if I had to dread, in a few moments, the utter extinction of knowledge and enjoyment! But thou haſt ordained me, O God, to life, to a life that ſhall know no end! At preſent my capacities are too great to exhibit themſelves in all their ſtrength. The body of death ſurrounds me, and fixes narrow limits to the workings of my mind. But ſoon ſhall I be free from theſe bonds. My ſoul will ſoar aloft, and mount into the realms of light: ſhe will riſe at the reſurrection of the juſt, and be liable to deſcend no more. Then, O my gracious God, then ſhall I firſt behold

hold thy works in all their extent, in all their beauty and ſplendour; then ſhall I be for ever employed in the inveſtigation of them, and never be weary of admiring thy wiſdom and power; then will all my deſires be ſatisfied, and all my wiſhes accompliſhed! This is not the place of my final appointment: it is but preparatory to a far better and more glorious ſtate. Here it is my buſineſs, by generous occupations, to begin to qualify myſelf for the purer delights that await me in that world, and even what I call difficult and imperfect in my preſent condition muſt, if I properly apply it, promote my future perfection. Thus does the chriſtian underſtand the deſign of his being, and the tendency of his powers; and thus does he diſpel the darkneſs that ſurrounds him on earth by the light of the goſpel, which diſcloſes to his view the faireſt proſpects of eternity.

Knowledge and virtue are, indeed, in and for themſelves, and without regard to futurity, the ſtrongeſt ſupports and the richeſt ſources of our happineſs. How, without knowledge, ſhould we ſatisfy the curioſity of our minds? How, without virtue, ſhould we tranquillize our hearts? How ſhould we tame our turbulent paſſions, how ſhould we controul them when they contend with each other, and bring them to a rational equilibrium, if we were deſtitute of knowledge and virtue? Let us only compare the mortal without hope with the chriſtian that expects eternity, and ſee which of them has the greateſt means, and the greateſt encouragement, to build his happineſs on this foundation, and to render his life pleaſant by knowledge and virtue. We will here allow them both to ſpeak their natural ſentiments, by which it will plainly appear which of them has the advantage of the other. It is true, knowledge is ornamental to the mind; thus ſpeaks the man whoſe hopes

hopes are confined to this life. I experience, that what thinks within me is capable of mounting above viſible objects, and of piercing into the combination of things. I feel a great pleaſure when I increaſe my ideas, and can diſcover the traces of the wiſe Author of nature. But how fooliſh and unprofitable is this my employment! Wiſdom cannot be acquired without much toil. Truth never appears to her votaries till after many ſucceſsleſs reſearches! one may fall into a hundred errors ſooner than diſcover one truth. We muſt dedicate both day and night to the ſtudy of the hidden operations of nature, before we can acquire but a ſlight knowledge of her ſecrets. Mean time, the ſpirit grows weary: its powers diminiſh; the body is weakened by too ſtrenuous exertions, and I become daily leſs capable of taſting the pleaſures of ſenſe. And what is, at length, the reſult of all my pains? After a few moments are paſt I ſhall be no more, and my laborioufly

riouſly acquired knowledge will likewiſe be no more. That which thinks in me, and often fooliſhly ſoars above the clouds, will in a few days be loſt to exiſtence. The great diſcoveries I am ſtriving to make will vaniſh into thin air, and my lofty imaginations, and my exalted conceptions, will be enveloped in the ſhades of everlaſting night. Such is the language of the man who has no views beyond the grave. His endeavours after knowledge muſt neceſſarily appear ridiculous to himſelf; and he has little or nothing to encourage him in the proſecution of it.

No leſs feeble are his motives to Virtue, and his purpoſe to follow her precepts will as eaſily fail. She fades like a flower that ſprings up on a parched ſoil, or in a ſtoney ground. Virtue, though great her native beauty, is yet not long-lived to the man who looks upon death as the period of his being; ſhe has not ſufficient attractions to make

make him conſtant and true to her love. Self-intereſt and the hope of advantage are the principal ſprings of human actions: but only few men are ſo enlightened as to ſee, at once, the connection between virtue and ſelf-love and with real advantage. It coſts a man labour and toil before he can arrive at a certain ſkill in goodneſs. He has many obſtacles to conquer, and many difficulties to encounter, if he would fulfill all his duties with exactitude, and conduct himſelf in all circumſtances like a true chriſtian. Riches, and honours, and days of eaſe, are not always the companions of integrity. How often, on the contrary, is it attended by poverty and ſcorn! Nay, is it any thing uncommon for the brighteſt virtue to be oppoſed with animoſity, and perſecuted with vengeance? And yet it is impoſſible, without virtue, to acquire tranquillity of mind, or ſatisfaction of heart. Vice, on the other hand, is often tricked out with charms: ſhe holds out, to her vo-

taries, power and authority, opulence and veneration; ſhe promiſes them the greateſt enjoyments. And yet Vice renders us unhappy, and, ſo long as we are ſlaves to her, it is impoſſible for us to be calm and contented. Therefore, if man is to flee from vice, and be in love with virtue; if he is thereby to live contented and happy; then he muſt have certain impelling motives thereto. But do you imagine that any one, who has no penalty to fear in futurity, and no reward to expect, is in a capacity to vanquiſh all temptations to evil, and to devote himſelf to the ſervice of inſulted Virtue and unnoticed Integrity? Certainly not. Her beauty might probably attract him; he might even determine to follow her precepts: but how long would his reſolution laſt? The firſt violent temptation would put it out of his mind. Were he frankly to explain himſelf, it is thus he would ſpeak: What will it profit me, if I earneſtly ſtrive to be virtuous? What avails this

this unremitted attention to all my thoughts, my desires, and actions? these violent conflicts with my propensities and passions? How difficult it is to conquer oneself! And what advantage, what fruit, have I at last to expect from the victory? My probity will be taken for selfishness, my piety will pass only for sadness of heart, and I shall sit solitary in the dust; while others, of laxer principles, are lolling in the seats of honour! What have I to provide for but my body and my temporal affairs? Why should I quarrel with the charms and delights that so many others enjoy? Shall I embitter my life by the restrictions of temperance, and for the sake of a fanciful spiritual pleasure, deny myself the more sure and substantial pleasures of sense? I have nothing to fear, or to hope, after death! So speaks the hopeless mortal: thus will his purposes to follow virtue be enfeebled: thus he allows himself to be seduced by the wages of sin; and discon-

tent and vexation, perplexity and fear, and every diſaſtrous conſequence of vice, at once take poſſeſſion of his heart. From want of hope, he neglects the principal and pureſt ſources of earthly happineſs, and will always be becoming more unhappy than he was.

Quite otherwiſe is it with the chriſtian, who expects immortality: he daily endeavours to augment his knowledge, and to improve in virtue, and thus daily promotes his true felicity. He can never be wanting in encouragement to his noble endeavours, never in firmneſs and zeal; and the futurity which is ever in his view, renders all he undertakes, in this deſign, not only eaſy but pleaſant. How pleaſant, he ſays in the ſimplicity of his heart, how pleaſant to me are the meditations I indulge on the perfections of my God and Father, the greateſt and beſt of beings! What a pure delight ſtreams through my ſoul, when I conſider his

his ways and admire his works! How it exalts my ſpirits when I perceive the wiſdom of the Creator in his creatures, and find out the marks of his greatneſs! How my ſoul repoſes in my Divine Redeemer, and in the commiſſion he fulfilled on earth! My knowledge indeed, in all reſpects, is but imperfect and weak; but this ſhall not diſhearten me from conſtantly labouring, with renewed ardour, at its extenſion and improvement. In the matters of moſt importance I have the goſpel for my guide, and am ſafe from all deception: by that I perceive an eternity approaching. The real knowledge I ſhall here collect, is out of the power of that ſpoiler, death. Hereafter, in the empire of ſpirits, I ſhall purſue my reſearches; what is falſe will evaporate from my attainments; and what is ſolid and juſt will form the baſis of my higher perfection. Thus does the hope of futurity excite the chriſtian; and the pleaſure he procures from his meditations on

religion and nature will be ever increaſing, as he has no need to fear it will ever be loſt.

The ſame influence, likewiſe, has hope upon his virtue, as the other ſource of human happineſs. It renders him inflexible againſt every temptation to wrong; and he renounces all things with joy, ſo ſoon as he thinks on the future world. How eaſy, how bleſſed, he exclaims, is the ſervice of my God! and how gracious is the Lord whom I ſerve, as ſo richly to requite my feeble endeavours in goodneſs, as to reward them for ever! No, my honeſt applications to pleaſe him are not in vain. Godlineſs has the promiſes of this life, and of that which is to come. The Lord commands me to believe that he is the rewarder of them that ſeek him. Coſt what it will to gain the victory over myſelf, yet how glorious are the triumphs I ſhall obtain! Virtue, even at preſent, affords me the ſin-

cereſt

cereſt pleaſure, and of this pleaſure it is not in death to deſpoil me; it will for ever continue, and for ever increaſe. And ſhall I allow myſelf to be turned aſide from the path of rectitude, and make ſhipwreck of my future happineſs, for riches, for earthly honours, for ſenſual gratifications, for fugacious trifles? No; rather forgetting thoſe things which are behind, and reaching forth unto thoſe things which are before, I preſs toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Chriſt Jeſus. Such are the reflections of the chriſtian, in expectation of a bleſſed immortality. Though knowledge and virtue be a grievous burden to him who is deſtitute of hope, yet are they the ſources of the moſt refined and exalted joys to the man that is ſure of eternal life.

To proceed in our compariſon of the hopeleſs mortal with the perſuaded chriſtian, let us, thirdly, contraſt their diſpoſi-

tions and comportment together. How hard misfortunes bear on him who knows no other and no better life than this! So long as riches, and honours, and worldly joys, fall copiouſly to his ſhare, he may find the means of concealing his wretchedneſs and his deplorable condition from himſelf. The dazzling glare of terreſtrial happineſs may oſſuſcate his mind, and hinder him from ſtedfaſtly fixing his eyes within, and from feeling acutely the deficiency of hope. But, is he vexed with adverſity and ſorrow, the glittering charms of honour and reſpect that ſurround him vaniſh away: the rapturous frenzy, that for ſome moments prevented him from viewing his deplorable ſtate, is come to an end: he is now thrown back upon himſelf. He now ſees clearly the emptineſs and vanity of all that is viſible and terrene: he experiences how inſufficient the poſſeſſion and enjoyment of them are to the contentment of his infinite deſires. Where will he now find reſt!

Where

Where will he ſeek comfort and pleaſure! While he is in ignorance of the comfort which religion and the hope of immortality afford us, it is impoſſible for him to be at peace. All his ground of conſolation conſiſts in theſe ſad ideas: it is thus with me; and all my lamentations cannot alter my fate. And what now will be the effect of theſe ideas? Will the afflictions he ſuffers be thus rendered more tolerable! Will this cauſe them to abandon the attack? Will he learn to conſider and uſe them as means to a ſuperior kind of happineſs? No; if they be great, then they ſink him into a certain inſenſibility, into a ſtate alike devoid of pleaſure and of pain; and even this inſenſibility is very apt to be deſtroyed by intenſe and keen reflection, and to be ſucceeded by the moſt cruel anguiſh of mind. The mortal, who has nothing to hope for beyond the grave, thus has the full weight of misfortune to bear, without the poſſibility of tolerably ſupporting himſelf under

it. If he loſe his outward advantages, or poſſeſſions, he loſes his all; he knows of nothing that can repair his damage. The ſources of his happineſs are ſtopped; how then can the enjoyment of them continue? If he loſe his friends, he loſes them, in his opinion, for ever: his loſs is irreparable; and it is not to be wondered at, if an incurable ſorrow takes poſſeſſion of his ſoul, and he gives himſelf up to deſpair.

Conſider, on the other hand, the chriſtian in misfortune, and ſee how patient, how firm, and how chearful, the hope of futurity makes him! Indeed, he likewiſe feels afflictions when they come upon him, and they frequently force the tears from his eyes: he tenderly bemoans the loſs of his friend; it hurts him when he is unjuſtly deprived of his honour, and he is obliged to undergo the bitter effects of contempt: it affects him when he is deſpoiled of his goods, and is thereby deprived of the means

means of generouſly affording relief, and the exalted delight it occaſions: it gives him concern when he is prevented, by bodily infirmities or pains, to be of ſervice to his neighbour, and of uſe to the world; it cuts him to the quick when he ſees virtue deſpiſed, and the nobleſt actions go unrewarded, or indeed repaid with injuries. In the mean time, however, he does not ceaſe to be happy. He has learned how to moderate his ſorrows from the doctrines of religion, and to procure himſelf comfort in the greateſt misfortunes. Is he ſcorned and perſecuted for his godlineſs and piety; he rejoices in this, that he ſuffers with Chriſt, as he knows that he ſhall alſo reign with him hereafter, and that the light afflictions of this preſent time are not to be compared with the glory he is then to enjoy. Does he loſe his temporal poſſeſſions; he is aſſured, that no man can take from him the teſtimony of a good conſcience, the pleaſure of virtue, and the grace of his God.

God. He deſpiſes the advantages and treaſures of the world, and fixes his view on the great reward the righteous judge ſhall give him at that day. And ſhould the injuſtice of mankind compel him to abandon his country, and to wander, a vagabond, in miſery on the earth, even this likewiſe he has learned how to bear. He looks up to a city whoſe builder and maker is God; he diſregards whatever is viſible, and directs his attention to the things that are not ſeen, and his converſe is in heaven. Are his friends taken from him by remorſeleſs death, or does ſome ſecret diſpenſation remove him far from ſuch as his ſoul holds dear; the expectation of futurity can even mitigate theſe bittereſt of ſorrows. No diſtance, no ſeparation, no death, can part him for ever from the friend of his heart. He will find him again in the kingdom of the juſt: he will there renew the bonds of amity with him, and, in that glorious ſtate, nothing can diſturb their noble and virtuous friend-

friendſhip. Thus the hope of the chriſtian can never be put to confuſion. It alleviates to him each attack of calamity, which bears the hopeleſs down to the ground, and plunges him in utter deſpair.

Let us, laſtly, caſt an eye on theſe two perſons, while lying on the bed of death, and conſider their different exits from the world. Approach the unhappy man who feels himſelf dying, and yet is totally deſtitute of all hope of another and better life! ſee how anxiety and diſmay diſtort his viſage! how he wrings his hands from perturbation and diſtreſs! what gloomy looks he caſts on the perſons around him! Death appears to him in his moſt dreadful form! he is truly the king of terrors! and, poor man, he has nothing that he can uſe as a covering againſt his darts, nothing to which he can addreſs himſelf for comfort in this moſt awful moment! He ſees himſelf turning to duſt, he ſees the grave and corruption

tion before him, and cannot call up a hope that he ſhall ever be ranſomed. The thought of his annihilation ſtrikes a chillneſs through his ſoul, and fills it with inſurmountable terrors. Whatever has hitherto brought him pleaſure and joy, is now flown from his imagination, and is departed for ever. He now, for the laſt time, ſees the orb of day, the all-reviving ſun, and is in expectation of an eternal night. His friends take leave of him for ever, and their charming converſe, as he thinks, will never chear him again. He muſt quit all things without any hope of acquiring more! —Can you figure to yourſelves a more deplorable condition than this?

On the other hand, obſerve the chriſtian, who, confiding in the promiſes of our Saviour, looks for a bleſſed immortality! How inſtructive are his laſt moments, and how calmly he meets death and eternity! Death is to him a meſſenger of peace; he announces

announces deliverance and freedom; he conducts him to life, to a far better and completer life than the preſent. Why ſhould he not willingly follow his call? Why ſhould he not readily exchange this life for the other? He loſes nothing that will not be reſtored to him, or be infinitely over-balanced. He has already a preſentiment of the joys that await him; and, the nearer his end approaches, his countenance brightens, and his ſoul is more cheared. He haſtens to the place of his deſtination with a pious impatience, and may addreſs his ſorrowing friends with comfortable aſſurance: "Weep not for me, O my friends, I ſhall ſoon embrace you in another life; continue to truſt in your great Redeemer!" Thus dies the chriſtian, full of hope, and enters into the joy of his Lord.

This is the vaſt difference between the hopeleſs mortal, and the chriſtian that looks for a bleſſed eternity. Theſe are the incomparable

comparable privileges the one poſſeſſes more than the other. To the former all nature is an unfathomable myſtery, and the purport of his own exiſtence is out of his ſight: the latter knows to what he is ordained, and the creation is to him the mirror of the perfections of its Author. Knowledge and virtue, the ſources of our happineſs, are ſhut againſt the one, and he has little or nothing to induce him to apply to them for repoſe: to the other, to the chriſtian, theſe ſources of pleaſure ſtand conſtantly open; and in the knowledge of truth, and the practice of virtue, he finds the moſt permanent joy. The former ſinks under the weight of mi-fortune: the latter rejoices in tribulations, and no accident can rob him of his happineſs. The former loſes all courage in death, and ſhudders at the approach of his end: the latter, the juſt man, has even hope in his death, and firſt begins properly to live, when he ſeems to be dying. Muſt you not

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confeſs, then, that, as chriſtians, we poſſeſs infinitely greater advantages than the man who does not believe in the promiſes of the goſpel? Muſt we not allow, that we ſhould be the moſt miſerable of all creatures, if our hopes were bounded by the limits of this life, if, after it, we had no other, no better to expect? How many cauſes, therefore, have we to praiſe and commemorate the benignity of our Saviour, who has brought life and undecaying exiſtence to light by the goſpel? How can we be grateful enough to him for the victory he has enabled us to obtain over death and the grave! for the glorious views he has given us of futurity! Does not ſuch a Teacher, does not ſuch a Benefactor, merit all our veneration? Does he not merit the utmoſt devotion of our heart, our moſt willing obedience? What low diſpoſitions ſhall we not betray, if we deſpiſe the goſpel of the Son of God, if we think ſlightly of his promiſes, and reject the felicity to which

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we are called? No, we will not do ſo; we have the happineſs of being chriſtians; we have the hope of everlaſting life. Let us prize this happineſs as it deſerves; let us walk worthy of this hope. Let us break forth in ſhouts of triumph to our glorified Redeemer, who has delivered us from the dread of annihilation, and given us the aſſurance of everlaſting life. But let us alſo ſhew, by our whole deportment, what mighty expectations we have. How ill would it become us, chriſtians, to ſeek our reſt, our ſatisfaction, our happineſs, in the things of the earth, ſince we are devoted to eternity! How ill would it become us, to be inconſoleable at the loſs of our earthly goods, or of our deareſt friends, like the heathens who are deſtitute of hope! How irrationally ſhould we act, if we ſhould only provide for our body, and beſtow no regard on the ſoul! How bitterly ſhall we hereafter lament our fooliſh choice, if we prefer the hard bondage of vice to the eaſy

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ſervice of virtue, and ſo loſe the refined delights and the eternal felicities of heaven! Oh, then, animate yourſelves to a generous and holy conduct, ye chriſtians, created and redeemed to an immarceſſible glory! Set looſe your hearts from every thing fugacious and earthly. Never fix your deſires and views to the objects on this ſide the grave. Raiſe yourſelves often in thought to eternity; endeavour to excite and confirm in yourſelves a heavenly mind, and let your whole behaviour be regulated by the future world. Evince in all things, even in the moſt deplorable events of life, that you are chriſtians, who look not ſo much on the things that are ſeen, as on thoſe that are not ſeen. Do honour to the religion you profeſs by a ſteady and chearful virtue, and take faſt hold on the hope that Chriſt has given you. It will not fail you, even in death; and you will enter, rejoicing, into the kingdom of your God.

Eaſter-Day.

ESTIMATE XIX.

THE VALUE OF MAN's LIFE-TIME UPON EARTH.

Man is like a thing of nought: his time paſſeth away like a ſhadow. Pſalm cxliv. 4.

THE VALUE OF MAN's LIFE-TIME UPON EARTH.

NOTHING is by many perſons more thoughtleſsly laviſhed away than their time. They hold nothing to be more inſignificant than an hour, a day, or a week. Therefore, as they have always time enough for every thing, they drive every thing off from one time to another, and take no account of its loſs. Therefore it is that time ſeems, by their feelings, ſo tedious in its progreſs, hangs often heavy on their hands, and makes them anxiouſly long for each

ſucceſſive change or ſection of it. Therefore it is, that they are ſo ſedulouſly attentive to the means of ſhortening their time, and ſo eager to ſeize on any thing that promiſes them this favour. Therefore, every diſſipation, every company, every amuſement, every greater or leſſer public ſpectacle, be it never ſo terrifying or alarming, finds ſo hearty a welcome.—Would one not imagine that perſons who think in this manner were ſure of their lives for hundreds or thouſands of years to come, and that the proſpect of this long continuance filled them with perturbation and horror? And yet theſe are beings of yeſterday, and will probably ſee nothing of to-morrow! Men, whoſe time flits away like a ſhadow! Men, whoſe longeſt life is as ſhort as it is uncertain, and who even themſelves but too frequently complain of the brevity and uncertainty of it! Whence, then, this direct contradiction to themſelves? How can one and the ſame ſubject have ſuch oppoſite qualı-

qualities, and occaſion ſuch oppoſite judgements? Becauſe it is not always ſeen in the ſame point of view, not always enjoyed by the ſame meaſure and rule; becauſe it is not always judged of by what in and of itſelf it is, but according to the preſent ſentiments a man has of it, and the uſe to which he applies it. Is the time ſtill future, do whole months and years lie ſtill between; then its tedious approach makes the man of the world impatient: is it preſent, and he knows not well how to employ it; then the weight of it is a burden: is it paſt, has it ſlipped from him unuſed and unenjoyed; then he laments the ſhortneſs and velocity of it: mere miſtakes, which he alone avoids, who knows how to eſtimate the value of time, and conſtantly to make a good uſe thereof. To him the time that is allotted him on earth is of the utmoſt importance, as he underſtands its deſtination and employment, and in the application of it has both of them conſtantly in view.

The time of our life upon earth is important, it is of great value, as it is ſhort, and of uncertain duration. He need not be very choice of his time, and might be ſomewhat prodigal of it, who had ſome thouſands of years to live, and was ſure of his life! But by no means he who can ſcarcely count ſo many days, and cannot reckon upon one with any aſſurance! Yes, ſhort is the longeſt life of man, and very few of the ſpecies attain to the utmoſt limits of it. Numbers are obliged to quit the courſe, while yet they have ſcarce entered upon it; have hardly advanced a few ſteps, ere they know any thing either of its tendency, or its pleaſures, or its ſorrows. And how many others are ſnatched away by death, before they have left the half of it behind, and come at once to the goal they thought ſuch a diſtance off! And what are even ſeventy or eighty years to ſuch as have paſſed them? Are they any thing more than a tranſient morning's dream to a being that looks

looks for immortality, and feels inexhauſtible powers and inſatiable deſires within him? And who of us all can tell whether he ſhall dream out this dream, or whether he ſhall not much ſooner wake in another ſcene of things? Who of us knows whether the preſent year may not be the laſt, whether the preſent day may not be the laſt to him? As certainly as we are all here at preſent alive, ſo certainly will more than one of us be no longer on the earth by the end of this year. And this may be the portion of the youngeſt, the healthieſt, the ſtrongeſt, as well as the aged and infirm; it may attack any one of us, however great the ſenſation of his vital powers may be at preſent! And muſt not the time, which is ſo ſhort and uncertain, be of great value to us? Can we afford to ſquander any of it away? Can we allow any of it to run to waſte? Did the youth know, that, even in the ſpring tide of his life, he may become a prey to death; that he may bloſſom here,

but not bear fruit; did the man reflect that he may not reach the pinnacle of extreme old age; that he may be thrown into the grave in the midſt of his courſe; how very differently would both the one and the other apply and enjoy their appointed time! how carefully would the former cheriſh and guard, in the bloom of his life, the innocence that is to be the ground of his bliſs in a better world! and how zealouſly would the other ſtrive to anſwer his vocation! But does either the one or the other know the contrary of this, with any aſſurance? Can the former reckon, with certainty, on ſeeing the ſummer? can the latter, on ſeeing the autumn of his life? And ſhould not both of them, then, ſo uſe the few uncertain years they have to live, as though every one of them were the laſt?

The time of our life on earth is, farther, very important, it is of great value, as it fleeth away with incredible ſpeed. Place thyſelf

thyſelf upon the margin of the rapid torrent; obſerve with what inceſſant force one drop purſues another, one wave drives on another, how every moment the ſurface of the ſtream is changed, how ſoon and how far what thou ſaweſt but now is rolled away beyond the ſight, and how it flows together to the larger river, and then, with the river itſelf, is abſorbed in the ocean; then wilt thou have a ſimilitude of the velocity with which thy hours, thy days, thy years, flow away. Yes, every thing, as it were, adds fleetneſs to time! What a conſiderable portion of it are we robbed of by ſleep, the brother of death! How cloſe together, how blended, are commonly the moment of being awake and the firſt inſtant of ſleep! How imperceptible, how totally effaced from our remembrance, how completely annihilated is the ſeparation between them! And then the various and ſucceſſive affairs of life, which admit of no delay, conſtantly purſuing and driving each other on; the daily,

daily, the hourly revolutions and changes of every thing about us; our own reſtleſs endeavours after ſome end, after greater activity and happineſs, after new pleaſures and proſpects; the multitude and variety of views, of projects, of concerns, of expectations, of obſtacles, of impulſes, of joys and ſorrows, which are continually meeting, purſuing, overtaking, or impeding us in the path of life; how much muſt theſe accelerate the race of time! Yes, rapid, inconceivably rapid, is its current! Ere we have looked about us, it is gone; ere we have made up our minds, the opportunity for doing or enjoying good is paſt. Nothing can detain its flight, nothing abate the rapidity of its courſe. Tireſome as it may frequently ſeem, in regard to our wiſhes and expectations, ſo quickly is it elapſed when once it is arrived; and he who knows not how to prize its worth, and does not feel its value, he who does not account of hours and moments as well as

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of days and years, to him will the greater part of it flow on unuſed and unenjoyed.

The time of our life on earth is of conſequence: thirdly, it is of great value, as it is irrevocable. Once paſt, it is gone for ever. Once elapſed, unuſed and unenjoyed, it is for ever loſt. No remorſe, no tears, no lamentations, can recall it from the gulph of the paſt. Where is the year we finiſh to-day? where is the hour we complete this moment? Can we live or enjoy either the one or the other again? O, young man, where is the period of thy guiltleſs childhood? Where are the days of thy blooming youth, O thou that art arrived at manhood? Where is the whole of thy life-time, thy childiſh, thy youthful, thy manly, thy advanced age, O thou that art full of years, who trembleſt on the brink of the grave? Is not the childhood of the youth, the youth of the man, the whole life-time of the aged, for ever elapſed, irrevocably

vocably elapſed and gone? Which of them all can ſet out upon his courſe afreſh, or only tread one pace of it again? Thou wiſheſt in vain, O thou who haſt triſled and ſquandered away thy youth, or ſpent thy beſt years in the ſervice of folly and vice, in vain doſt thou wiſh their return; in vain doſt thou repine at the inconceivable velocity with which they eſcaped thee; in vain doſt thou deplore thy levity, thy heedleſſneſs, and the miſuſe thou haſt made of the faireſt ſeaſon, the beſt years of thy life! Their loſs is irrecoverable; the ceaſeleſs torrent of time has carried them away, and nothing can repair the damage thou haſt thus brought on thyſelf. The time that is ſtill before thee, thou mayſt more wiſely and better employ, and thereby become happier; but the hours, the days, the years, that are once behind thee, are no more in thy power, and the detrimental effects of the unemployment or abuſe of them can never be wholly removed. And muſt not

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the time that is ſo irrevocable, the loſs of which is ſo irreparable, be of great importance and of great value in our eyes? We ſhould, ſurely, be as cautious and provident as poſſible in the management of what we may ſo eaſily neglect and loſe, but which cannot with impunity be neglected and loſt.

The time of our life on earth is, fourthly, important; it has a great value, as it is granted us for the purpoſe of executing a number of weighty and difficult matters. Oh, how much have we all to do in this ſhort ſpace of life, if we applied it to the ends for which it is given, if we would be and become here what we are called to be and to become! To ſatisfy our animal wants, to procure us food and raiment, to ſupport our terreſtrial life, to purſue ſome art or trade; to provide for the maintenance of our family, to promote the public welfare, and to perform a certain part therein; this

this is not all, this is not the chief of what we have here to perform and bring to effect! To theſe purpoſes we have no need of all the great capacities and powers we have received of the Creator, of all the means to higher perfection and happineſs of which he has made us ſuſceptible! No; here we are to become rational, wiſe, and virtuous creatures; here we are to get the better of our animal propenſities, to govern ourſelves, to think and live by principles; here we are to love God and our brethren, to direct all our inclinations and deſires to the beſt and worthieſt objects, to ſeek our ſatisfaction in juſtice and beneficence, to refine and ennoble our taſte, to ſtudy to employ all our capacities and powers in the beſt manner, and by theſe means to prepare ourſelves for the employments and pleaſures of a higher life. And are theſe, truly, things that are ſo quickly, ſo eaſily effected? Is this, truly, the work of a few hours or days? Do they not require many and reiterated

rated attempts, continued practice, inceſſant application? Have we not many both inward and outward impediments and difficulties to encounter by the way?—Can we ever, in all theſe particulars, become ſo expert, ſo complete, that we cannot ſtill become more apt and more perfect? Are we not capable of a conſtantly progreſſive, of an unbounded perfection? And muſt not the time in which we have all this to do, and which is ſo ſhort and uncertain, be important, be precious in our ſight? Certainly the man who degrades himſelf, in his thoughts, to a level with the beaſts of the field, and expects after death to ſhare their lot, may conſider the time of his life on earth as inſignificant, and be indifferent to the uſe of it! But to him who reflects on his true appointment, who underſtands the dignity of the man and the chriſtian, who conſiders and feels his immortality, his affinity with ſuperior beings, and with the Deity himſelf, to him every day, every

hour of his earthly exiſtence, muſt and will be highly important. To turn it to the beſt account muſt and will be, at once, both his duty and his joy.

A fifth circumſtance, which renders the time of our life on earth of much importance, and gives it a great value, is this: ſhort and uncertain and irrevocable as time is, yet, in every greater or ſmaller ſection of it, we may do much good or much evil, may be very ſerviceable or very hurtful. To this neither a whole ſtage of a man's life, nor whole years, nor months, are requiſite. Every day may occaſion, to ourſelves and others, whole centuries of happineſs or miſery. Every hour may be the parent of a thouſand and a thouſand gloomy or pleaſant, chearful or ſorrowful, hours and days. They all are concatenated together, are all interwoven with each other, and all fruitful in great and important effects. Haſt thou laviſhed away and miſ-employed

one hour, one day, one month, one year of thy life; thou haſt not only loſt this time, and loſt it for ever, but its loſs and its miſuſe has the moſt baneful influence of all thy future hours and days, and months and years. On the other hand, haſt thou well employed the preſent time, whether long or ſhort; haſt thou ſown good ſeed therein, and exerciſed thyſelf in uſeful matters; then wilt thou reap an increaſe of a thouſand fold in the times to come. And how much good, or how much evil, how many generally uſeful or generally prejudicial things may we think, and will, and ſpeak, and deſign, and do, in one ſingle day, in one ſingle hour! How often is a day, or an hour, a ſource of never-failing joy, or of unremitting ſorrow, to ourſelves and others! How often is the foundation laid of a thouſand agreeable or diſagreeable ſenſations, of a thouſand laudable or ſhameful actions! How often does a day, or an hour, tranquillize or diſturb, embitter or

ſweeten the whole ſuceeeding life! How often does it ſtrengthen the infirm, or render him weaker ſtill! inſtruct or confuſe the ignorant! guide the innocent aright, or ſeduce him aſtray! comfort the ſufferer, or multiply his ſorrows! amend the wicked, or corrupt him more! rejoice or grieve the good! How much is frequently effected by one thought, one word, one opinion, one action, one miſtake, or one omiſſion! and how far do its effects extend! And if an hour or a day may be ſo important to ourſelves and to others, how important muſt whole months, whole years, how important muſt our whole life-time be! What a heavy burden of bad, of criminal attempts and actions, muſt the vicious be heaping upon themſelves during the whole courſe of it! And how rich a treaſure of good and divine ſentiments and actions, of actions that God will requite, may the virtuous be collecting together! And muſt not the time, wherein we may do this or

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the other, and one of which we ſhall certainly do, be of the greateſt importauce to us?

Yes; the time of our life on earth is important: it is of a great value; for the uſe or neglect of it has an influence on all our future fortunes; their conſequences accompany us into the grave, and out of the grave again into the regions of eternity. The preſent, O my chriſtian brother, is the ſeed-time. If thou doſt not carefully cultivate the field intruſted to thee, if thou doſt not ſow good ſeed therein, or ſoweſt it ſparingly, and doſt not guard and tend it as it ſprings up and fills; then thou canſt not hope to reap when the ſeaſon comes; the crop will fail thee; thou wilt ſuffer indigence and miſery, or thou wilt reap but ſparingly; thou wilt be reduced to eat the bitter and corrupted fruit of thy wicked works. This is the time of exerciſe and diſcipline. Here thou art to allow thyſelf

to be educated, formed, and improved: here thou art to employ thy faculties and powers, to exert them as becomes a rational, an immortal creature; to love and to prize truth and virtue above all things, to rejoice in God, to obey him chearfully, and to ſtudy contentment and happineſs in the fulfilling of his will. Doſt thou not make this thy ſtudy, rejecteſt thou the diſcipline and the inſtruction of thy Father in heaven; doſt thou refuſe to exerciſe thyſelf in what is right and good: then wilt thou proceed, ignorant, unimproved, and unexpert, from the ſchool of this life, into thy ſuperior appointment: then, at the time of retribution, thou haſt nothing in return for thy induſtry and fidelity to expect; then muſt thou ſuffer the penalty due to thy untractableneſs and thy diſobedience; then muſt thou, if thou wouldſt even there be happy, then muſt thou become ſo by much harder, much ſeverer diſcipline. Here is the time for preparation: here muſt thou learn to love,

love, and to uſe, and to enjoy, at leaſt as a noviciate, the occupations, the pleaſures, the advantages of the future life, and give a nobler direction to thy deſires and thy taſte, as is fitting for that ſuperior ſtate. Art thou averſe to this; doſt thou perſiſt in retaining thy animal, thy earthly diſpoſitions: then muſt thy delights, thy pleaſures, thy happineſs, finally terminate with the preſent life; then art thou not ſuſceptible of the purer delights, the nobler pleaſures, the exalted bliſs, which, at the time of enjoyment, await them who have prepared and fitted themſelves for them. But, well for them, eternally well, who have actually done ſo, and continue to do it! They may promiſe themſelves the richeſt harveſt from what they have ſown, the moſt glorious fruits from the docility with which they have allowed themſelves to be educated, and the moſt bliſsful enjoyment from their careful preparation. And muſt not the time, which thus determines all our fu-

ture condition, which procures us either bleſſedneſs or miſery, reward or puniſhment, in the other world; muſt not this time be important, muſt it not be of ineſtimable value to us?

But if, then, the time of our life on earth be ſo ſhort and uncertain, if it flit ſo quickly away, if it be ſo irrevocable, if it be allotted for the performance of ſo many weighty and difficult matters; if we may, in every, even in the ſmalleſt ſection of it, do ſo much good or ſo much evil, ſo many generally uſeful or generally hurtful actions, and if the application of it have ſo great an influence on our future condition, Oh, then, conſider and uſe this time agreeably to its value, and the purpoſes for which it is granted! It may be huſbanded, but it may likewiſe be laviſhed away: it may be comparatively prolonged, but it may likewiſe be ſhortened: it may leave veſtiges of its paſſage behind, which may gladden

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ourſelves and others for ever; it may likewiſe be totally loſt to us and to them. The former is the aim and the happineſs of the wiſe; this the behaviour and the puniſhment of fools. O, let that be your aim, your moſt zealous, your inceſſant aim! Treaſure the time, the ſhort, the uncertain, the fleeting, the irremeable, the important time you have here to live; prize each year of it, each day, every hour. Be not prodigal, be œconomical of your time, of which you may have ſo little left, and of the application whereof you muſt one day give an account. Let not your time paſs unemployed, unfertilized away. Let it not elapſe in idleneſs or vice. Beware of trifling or ſquandering away the hours, the days, that are ſo great and important in their value, and irreparable in their loſs. Seize and fructify every moment that is ſtill in your power; mark it with ſome reflection, with ſome action not unworthy of a man; and thereby give a certain fixture and dura-

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tion to what is ſo fleeting and vain. Meditate and effect as much good as you always can; and though you cannot thus ſtop the rapid progreſs of time, yet make it memorable to you, and the recollection of it a foundation of joy.—Procraſtinate nothing; ſince the time is uncertain, it is not in your power. Do and enjoy the good to-day, which to-day you are allowed to do and to enjoy; ſince you know not whether you will have time, and ability, and opportunity, for it to-morrow. Conſider, judge, and act, at preſent, as the preſent is connected with the future. Frequently reflect, that ſhortly time will be no more to you; no time for practice and preparation: and the more you have ſtill to do, in regard of your improvement, haſten ſo much the more to finiſh this important taſk. The farther the day of your earthly life is already ſpent, ſo much the more ſedulouſly apply every remaining hour or moment of it to the performance of what you have to do, that you

you may not be unprepared when the night comes on wherein no man can work. And then, but only then, let your time paſs away like a ſhadow! It is not loſt; it has been that to you which it was appointed to be, what it was deſigned to procure you; and to time, well employed, enſues eternity, wherein we ſhall not lament the right uſe of it, wherein we ſhall inceſſantly enjoy it!

Long and bleſſed be your days, my deareſt companions and hearers! May chearful confidence and pious joy be their conſtant attendants; may hope and reliance on God, and the proſpect of a better life, ſhed light and happineſs around them! Heightened by wiſdom and virtue, may they ſerenely glide away; free from all ſelf-accuſing ſorrows, free from reproaching and anxious cares! May no day of your lives paſs by unuſed and unenjoyed; may none of them cauſe you perplexity and

and ſhame in the ſolemn hour of death! None witneſs againſt you at the day of judgement! But may each of them be marked by uſeful employments, by ſome laudable action, by thankful enjoyment of the bounties of heaven, each be fruitful in bleſſed effects for the future life! Yes; though ſhort and fleeting your days on earth, yet may they be rich in the bleſſings of God, in the works of righteouſneſs, in the works of beneficence and love, and the memorial of them be as joyful to yourſelves as to your contemporaries, your children, and your deſcendants! And when, at length, the laſt of the days of your life ſhall appear, when you are ſummoned to exchange time for eternity, then may the peace of God conſole and gladden your hearts, then may you take up the words of the triumphant apoſtle: "I have fought the good fight; I have finiſhed my courſe. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteouſneſs, which the Lord, the righ-

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teous Judge, ſhall give me!" I have ſtood firm to God and to virtue, and ſhall receive the prize from my Judge and my Father!—Yes; teach us, O God, O our merciful Father! ſo teach us to think, and to live, that we may paſs through the grave, and gate of death, into the bliſs of the better, the eternal life!

ESTIMATE XX.

OF

SPIRITUAL

EXPERIENCES.

If any man will do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of myſelf. John vii. 17.

OF

OF

SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES.

THERE are three ways of arriving at the knowledge of truth and certainty; reaſon, faith, and experience. Reaſon lays before the inquirer certain general propoſitions, received of all men, and ſimply irrefragable. She connects and compares known truths together, and, by juſt conſequences, produces a concluſion, which was either not at all, or not clearly enough, known before. She traces things up to their firſt principles, and thereby enlightens and explains them.—Faith reſts itſelf on the teſtimony of another: it examines the accounts that are given of any matter, and the credibility of the witneſſes

that deliver them. It compares the different parts of the hiſtory together, and with the circumſtances wherein they were performed, or happened; and when it finds a ſufficient capacity and integrity in the witneſſes, and a correſpondence in their narratives, it yields its acquieſcence thereto.—Experience, in ſhort, inſtructs us of the things that fall under our knowledge, or by the impreſſion and effects they produce on our eyes, our ears, or the other organs of ſenſe. She gives us alſo to obſerve the inward motions or alterations that happen either in our ſoul or body, and thereby teaches us to form a judgement both of our natural and our ſpiritual or intellectual ſtate. Would we, then, render our knowledge as perfect as we may, we muſt take all theſe three different ways for knowing the truth, and for being certain of it. And this, not merely in regard of human knowledge, but it is likewiſe neceſſary and indiſpenſable in regard of reli-

gion.

gion. We muſt endeavour to obtain, not only an hiſtorical, but alſo a rational and experimental knowledge of every truth, as far as its nature, and our ſituation, will allow. The more numerous the evidences we have of any matter, the greater will our certainty of it be, and the more completely ſhall we be ſatisfied about it. There are, indeed, doctrines in religion, which we can only know through faith; and the truth of them, in reſpect of us, depends only on hiſtorical narrative. But others, and thoſe the greateſt number, are of ſuch a nature, that they are likewiſe to be known by means of reaſon and experience; and, in ſuch caſes, we may very advantageouſly blend theſe ſeveral ways for arriving at the truth. Revealed religion is chiefly founded on the narratives and the teſtimony of perſons who lived many ages before our times. Theſe perſons relate to us, in their writings, the ſad conſequences produced by ſin, and the wiſe arrangements eſtabliſhed by God

for our reſtoration and amendment; they diſcover to us the counſels and determinations of the Moſt High; they inform us of the ſervice he requires of us, and deliver us the conditions we muſt fulfil, if we would partake of his favour, and be happy for ever. Theſe narratives, then, are too important, by far, for us to receive and adopt them, without examining the authority on which they ſtand. We muſt, therefore, diſcuſs the characters and the credibility of the narrators on whoſe authority they depend, and endeavour to require a certainty of their truth. Theſe are the firſt means of arriving at knowledge and certainty; and the effect will be, the introduction of faith. But our knowledge may be ſtill more perfect; it may be brought to a higher degree of evidence and certainty, if we purſue the other way, and conſult our reaſon. Though reaſon might not have diſcovered the doctrines of revealed religion by her own penetration, yet may ſhe pro-

pronounce upon them after their promulgation. She may deduce many of them from the firſt principles of human knowledge. She may ſhew us their various and exact connection with other truths already known. She may reconcile the ſeeming contradictions between them. She may preſent us with new evidence for their truth. In ſhort, ſhe may draw many neceſſary and important conſequences from them. Her concurrence makes theſe doctrines the more acceptable, and our certainty of them muſt be ſo much the greater. But here we are not to ſtop: we muſt likewiſe, in regard of religion, take the way of experience; we muſt endeavour to become certain of its truth and excellency by our own ſenſations. On this experimental knowledge all religion, indeed, depends; as nothing can ſupply the want of it, and as all the other kinds of knowledge, unleſs they are connected with this, are incapable of rendering us happy. We

muſt, however, be extremely cautious on this head, leſt we deceive ourſelves, and fall on ſuch a path as will be very dangerous both to ourſelves and others.

That I may warn you of this wrong courſe, I have determined to treat ſomewhat circumſtantially of a matter that has ſo great an influence on our tranquillity and happineſs, and to ſet it in as plain a light as the ſhort time allowed to theſe diſcourſes will permit. The words of Jeſus, which I have read to you, preſent us with a fit occaſion for theſe reflections. What can he mean but this: If you ſuffer the doctrine which I deliver to you, in the name of God, to have its due effect upon you; if you follow my precepts, and reduce them to practice, you will infallibly feel their godly power; you will become better thereby, more tranquil, and more pious; you will perceive, by experience, that my doctrine hath a celeſtial origin; that I am not

not a mere philoſopher, but addreſs you as a meſſenger from God. Our Lord intimates, therefore, that a man may acquire an experimental knowledge of the truth of religion, and that it is an excellent means of arriving at the complete aſſurance thereof.

Let us now inveſtigate the nature and quality of theſe ſpiritual experiences; and remark the principal rules to be obſerved in our judgement of them, for preſerving us from the ordinary miſtakes thereupon.

The term Spiritual Experience is generally uſed in a very indefinite ſenſe, and they who boaſt the moſt about it have frequently the moſt obſcure and erroneous conception of it. They adorn with this expreſſion every feeling that is ſomewhat ſtrong, every extraordinary motion of the blood, without firſt examining from whence theſe feelings and emotions proceed. They continually confound the imagination and

experience together, and often look upon the moſt natural changes in their body and mind as ſomething extraordinary and ſupernatural. When they are deſired to explain their experiences, or to ſhew whence they ariſe, they evade the queſtion by declaring the whole of the matter to be incomprehenſible. But were they at the pains to inquire a little into their own nature, and inform themſelves ſomewhat of the manner wherein the ſoul acts upon the body, and the body upon the ſoul, then many of the incomprehenſibilities, at which they aſtoniſh themſelves and others, would fall to the ground, and they would obtain a complete ſolution of what they at preſent regard as an inexplicable myſtery. When we ſpeak of experiences in common life, we all underſtand what the term implies, and what we mean thereby: we denote nothing elſe by it than that we feel the effects of particular things, and are certain of them. Thus we ſay, for example, the

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power of the ſun, the property of the air, the violence of the wind, and the like. That is, we feel the effects that theſe things have upon us, the alterations they produce in our bodies, and we are aſſured of them. Apply this now to ſpiritual experiences, and you will have a plain and juſt comprehenſion of them. What are they but the feelings of the good effects religion has upon us, of the happy changes it has produced in our thoughts, our judgements, our inclinations, our actions, and our pleaſures? This idea is perfectly plain. It coincides with the nature of our ſoul; and we need only attentively conſider what we call ſpiritual experiences, for finding that they are no otherwiſe to be deſcribed. I will explain myſelf farther on this matter. The doctrines of religion have not only an enlightening, but alſo an affecting and a perſuaſive power. They not only rectify our underſtanding, but they alſo ameliorate our wills. They purify

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our hearts, they determine our deſigns and deſires, and move us to good and virtuous reſolutions. If, then, they produce in us ſuch effects, we ſhall have a lively knowledge, or, which is the ſame thing, we ſhall acquire an experimental knowledge of the power and efficacy of the doctrines of religion. A few examples will ſet this matter in the cleareſt light. Every devout chriſtian conſiders the gracious diſpoſitions of God towards ſinners; he purſues, with ſilent attention, the wiſe and good methods which the Moſt High hath ordained for reclaiming and reſtoring the human race; he admires the greatneſs of the love diſplayed in our behalf: he makes the application of it to himſelf. "Me likewiſe, unworthy as I am," ſays he to himſelf, "me hath God loved; even me; even on me hath he ſhed his compaſſions!" Theſe thoughts affect him, and fill his heart with the ſincereſt returns of love to his everlaſting Benefactor. He has thereby an experimental

perimental knowledge ot the force of what religion teaches us of the love of God. And how? He feels the good effects that declaration has upon him, and will thereby be moved to pious reſolutions. So is it likewiſe with the other doctrines of religion. When, therefore, the conſideration of the indecency, the hatefulneſs, and the ſhameful conſequences of ſin, and the exceeding great diſpleaſure God hath towards it, creates in us an actual abhorrence of all kinds of vice; when the conſideration of the beauty and amiableneſs of virtue, the reaſonableneſs and excellency of the law of God and Chriſt, and the great obligations we are under to our Creator and Deliverer, inſpires us with a predominant inclination to all good, we then experience the ſanctifying efficacy of theſe doctrines. When the conſideration of the wiſdom, might, and goodneſs of the Moſt High, the diſplay of his holy and irreproachable government, and his fatherly care of the juſt;

juſt; when reflections on the nature and end of our preſent ſituation, and its connection with the future eternity, lightens our calamities, tranquillizes our heart, makes us firm and courageous in misfortune, and teaches us to truſt in the help of the Lord; then have we a delightful experience of the ſtrength of theſe conſolations; we feel the ſolidity of the ſupport religion affords to mankind in afflictions. Spiritual experiences, then, are, in general, nothing more than the conſciouſneſs of the ſalutary effects which the maxims and rules of conduct, the emotions and conſolations of religion, produce in us. Theſe effects, however, ariſe from two different cauſes: one being the proper and peculiar force of religion, and the other the particular aſſiſtance of the Spirit of God.

The doctrines of religion have in themſelves a natural power to move, and to convince all thoſe that embrace them, and

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to direct their conduct this way or that. This power they have in common with all other truths. No ſooner have we obtained a plain, juſt, lively, and certain knowledge of ſome important truth, but immediately it has likewiſe a ſtronger or weaker degree of influence on our heart, imparting to us either joy or ſorrow, hope or fear, pleaſure or diſpleaſure, and inducing us to make a proper uſe of the lights we have obtained. Now, as the doctrines of religion are in their nature much greater, much more elevated, and important, than all others, as they ſtand in the ſtrongeſt connection with our preſent and future happineſs, as they ground their authority on a revelation from God, ſo muſt they neceſſarily have a greater power to act upon the will; and it is impoſſible for us to behold them with a certain degree of perſpicuity and energy, and to apply them home, without feeling that they have an effect upon our deſires and averſions, our inclinations and abhorrences,

rences, without being moved to follow the information we have acquired, and to make it the rule of our whole deportment.

Since, therefore, what we call ſpiritual experiences are produced no leſs by our natural faculties than the intrinſic power of the doctrines of the goſpel, we are not to wonder that we are often deceived when we would ſtate the peculiar cauſe of any ſenſation or change in our turn of mind, ſo long as we are unacquainted with the nature of the principles of ſuch effects. We neither know the way in which our ſpirits act, nor the manner of God's proceedings ſo thoroughly, as in all caſes properly to diſtinguiſh them, and clearly to explain them. We ſhall, however, avoid many miſtakes; we ſhall rightly judge of our moral ſtate, and uncommonly facilitate the practice of religion, if we obſerve the remarks and examples I ſhall now lay before you.

In the firſt place, we are not to take every good deſire or emotion we feel for the particular act of the Holy Ghoſt. God is, indeed, all in all. His influence created every thing we behold; and we have to thank him for our exiſtence, and the preſervation of our lives. His Providence extends no leſs over ſpirits than over bodies. He maintains the powers of our ſouls according to his Mighty Will; he elevates and ſtrengthens them when and how he pleaſes. Our dependance is intirely on him, and without him we can do nothing. But God acts not without means, where ordinary means are ſufficient to his purpoſe; he performs no miracle without a weighty cauſe. He acts with us as with rational beings: he will have us to uſe the capacities he has given us; not dealing with us as with machines, which require continually to be puſhed on, or to be wound up for reaching their proper effect. He, therefore, that takes every lively thought,

thought, every acuter feeling excited in a delicate mind by reflecting on ſome important truth, for the conſequences of an immediate influence of God, he plainly declares thereby that he underſtands not the nature of the human ſoul, that he is accuſtomed to make incomprehenſible myſteries of things that are to be deduced from natural cauſes, and that he is poſſeſſed by fanatical principles. We muſt, indeed, as I have already remarked, attribute all that we think or do to God, as the Father of lights, from whom all good gifts originally proceed; but we do no honour to the Holy Ghoſt, we render our piety ſuſpected, and make religion itſelf contemptible, when we aſcribe to its operations all the emotions of our hearts, which are not unfrequently inordinate and impure enough. This erroneous opinion hath already given occaſion to many abuſes among chriſtians. They that ſuffer themſelves to be blinded thereby, generally hold their penetration,

their undertakings, and their actions, to be much greater and more important than indeed they are; and it is by no means uncommon for ſuch people to attribute to themſelves a certain kind of infallibility; at leaſt, it is with difficulty they can be brought to endure contradiction. They imagine it to be impoſſible for them to miſtake, when they follow their inward impulſes; and the ſingle aſſertion, *It is ſo with me*, ſtands them in ſtead of all ground for their opinions.

In the ſecond place, we muſt carefully diſtinguiſh between the influence our natural conſtitution, and our outward circumſtances, have upon our exerciſes of piety, and our moral conduct, from the operations of religion and the Spirit of God, and not take them for ſpiritual experiences of a peculiar order. You know, Sirs, that our ſoul is moſt intimately connected with our body; and that no conſiderable alteration

can happen to the one, but a correſpondent alteration is to be perceived in the other. When every part of our body is in health, when the mixture and motion of its juices go properly on, when we feel neither pain nor languor, then our ſpirit is alert and active in all its functions; it operates freely, and without impediment, and it coſts us no trouble to think with order and preciſion. Reaſon, then, prevails over all the inferior powers of our ſoul, and we contemplate the truth in an unclouded light, if no violent paſſions intervene. But, on the other hand, if ordinary or extraordinary alterations ariſe in our body, our underſtanding and our ſoul no longer act in ſo regular a manner as they were hitherto accuſtomed to do. For inſtance, if our mind be affected by agreeable objects; if we find ourſelves in a delightful country, where nature preſents herſelf in all her charms, and every living creature appears to rejoice; if our heart be affected by the

tender melody of ſounds; then our juices take a quicker motion; we are tranſported with joy, our thoughts flow on in a more rapid ſucceſſion, and with increaſing vivacity and vigour; and, if we then reflect on the ſublime doctrines of religion, the pleaſure we feel in them muſt of neceſſity be uncommonly great, they muſt often be perfectly extatic. On the other hand, when our body is attacked by any diſorder; when the juices get thick, and the blood creeps heavily and ſlowly along in the veins; when the nerves become relaxed and feeble, the operations of our ſoul will be affected by the change. We ſhall find it laborious to think with order and continuity; our thoughts ſlowly ſucceed each other, with repeated interruptions; they will always have ſomething obſcure about them, and we ſhall endeavour in vain to render our comprehenſion ſo active and clear as at other times. The moſt important, the ſublimeſt truths, will then make but little

impreſſion on us. We may hear or read the moſt evident propoſitions, and yet be indifferent and almoſt inſenſible to them. We ſhall flee from joy, and fall an eaſy prey to prevailing ſadneſs. The ſame thing may, in many reſpects, be advanced of the outward circumſtances in which we are placed. When we lead an unſollicitous, a convenient, and a tranquil life; when we can enjoy the delights of friendſhip, and the agreeable converſation of a well-cultivated acquaintance, our thoughts will certainly flow more freely, our feelings will be more lively, and we ſhall conſider and practiſe religion with greater chearfulneſs and ardour, than when we are oppreſſed by cares for food and raiment; when we are in low and adverſe circumſtances, when one misfortune lays ſiege to us after another; or when we are ſurrounded by deſponding perſons, and are obliged chiefly to frequent the melancholy. So great is the influence our conſtitution and our outward

ward circumſtances have on the offices and operations of our ſoul. May we not, then, be liable to miſtake, when we repreſent theſe alterations which ſo naturally ariſe, and are ſo eaſily explained, as ſupernatural revelations and particular interpoſitions of heaven? May we not deceive ourſelves, when we eſteem any more ſenſible reflections, any more joyous ſenſation, for immediate conſolations from on high, or for the raptures of heavenly tranſports? May we not be vexed and tormented, in vain, when we conſider the indifference and comfortleſſneſs which take their riſe in the decays of the body as a dereliction of God, or as the tokens of his diſpleaſure, and indications of his wrath?

Neither are we, in the third place, to reckon a certain particular degree of vivaciouſneſs of ſentiment as an eſſential part of ſpiritual experience. This is a very hurtful prejudice of many chriſtians, whom,

however, we cannot deny to have a ſincere affection for virtue. They have a high eſtimation of ſenſible and violent feelings, and think their private acts of devotion cannot be acceptable without them. Their ſorrow for ſin muſt be accompanied by burning tears; their joy in God and his ſalvation muſt be rapturous and extatic; their aſpirations after eternal felicity muſt be violent and tranſporting, or they think them of no advantage to their ſpiritual concerns; a rational abſtinence from every thing that is bad, a practical hatred againſt it, a liberal and conſiderate deſign of uniformly acting in the ſervice of God and goodneſs, a calm reliance on the perfections and wiſe providence of the Moſt High, an immovable expectation of the kingdom of reaſon and virtue to come, is by no means ſufficient for them. Their blood muſt have as great a ſhare in their devotion as their rational ſpirit, and perhaps a greater, for making them ſatisfied with it. How much

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uſeleſs pains do ſuch perſons often take for rouzing within them ſome ſenſible and vehement ſenſation! What diſquietude, what perturbation, what deſpondency, are they in, when they cannot raiſe their raptures to the height they wiſh them to attain, and which they often regard as indiſpenſably neceſſary! Many a chriſtian, with more ſincerity than judgement, falls to prayer in his ſolitude; he humbles himſelf before God for his manifold ſins, confeſſes the unrighteouſneſs and infamy of his treaſons, abhors his failings and tranſgreſſions, and calls upon his God for compaſſion and pardon. Sin is, above all things, grievous to him; he wiſhes for nothing ſo much as to be freed and purified from it; he forms the moſt earneſt intentions never more to obey his irregular deſires, but to live a life of righteouſneſs and piety; he devotes himſelf, with all his heart, to a willing and faithful obedience to all the commands of God. In this manner he has a rational

and juſt experience of the efficacy the doctrines of religion poſſeſs of rendering their confeſſors repentant, and of defending them from wickedneſs and ſin; and he has a right to reſt upon them, and ſtrenuouſly to ſet about reducing his good reſolutions to practice. But he is too much accuſtomed to ſenſitive repreſentations and feelings to be ſatisfied with them. During his prayer he has felt no violent anguiſh on account of his ſins; he has had no feeling of the horrors of hell; his tears would not flow ſo copiouſly as he could have wiſhed; his aſſurance of grace was not quite ſo ſenſible, and did not move him ſo forcibly, as in other circumſtances, and at other times. Theſe things fill him with diſtruſt; he laments over his hard and inſenſible heart; he bewails his deplorable derelict-ion of God; he reprobates the imperfection of his devotion, and imagines that God has turned away his face from him, and that he is utterly forſaken of heaven.

Theſe reflections plunge him into the deepeſt diſquietudes, and render the good effects which religion had operated in him, at leaſt for a length of time, intirely fruitleſs. Trouble and tormenting ſollicitudes take poſſeſſion of his ſoul; and nothing will reſtore him to tranquillity and peace till he be able to call forth thoſe tears, and excite thoſe ſenſible emotions, thoſe violent feelings, which he has hitherto endeavoured in vain to produce. Then, for the firſt time, he experiences, according to his idea, the bitterneſs of ſin; then taſtes peace with God, feels a confidence of forgiveneſs, and then ſeems to hear the Moſt High calling out to him, "Thy ſins are forgiven thee."—But, how liable to error is ſuch a conduct as this! Does religion, then, conſiſt in theſe ſenſual feelings, in a more rapid or more ſluggiſh circulation of the blood and the animal ſpirits? or in the plain and juſt deſign, the firm and ſtedfaſt reſolution, and the earneſt endeavour to walk

walk after its precepts? Are we not to worſhip God in ſpirit and in truth? Is not the chriſtian worſhip a reaſonable ſervice? Muſt we found our tranquillity, our comfort, and our hopes, on things that are not in our power, which depend on the changeable conſtitution of our bodies, on the degree of our health, our outward circumſtances, and frequently even on accidents? Are we to make the diſcharge of our duties unneceſſarily oppreſſive and hard, and thereby hinder our progreſs in virtue? Are we to live in a conſtant turmoil and confuſion, and never enjoy the pleaſing tranquillity which true virtue provides for her friends? No. The more rational, gentle, and quiet our experiences of the power of religion be, the leſs ſenſible and eventual they are, the better and more infallible are they.

Fourthly, we muſt neither lay down our own experiences and feelings as a law for others,

others, nor make foreign experiences and feelings a law to ourſelves. The effects which the doctrines of religion produce in different men, are, as we have already noticed, as various as their temperaments, their ſagacity, and other circumſtances; indeed, not eſſentially, but yet in quality and degree. With one perſon they are more lively and ſenſual; with another, more rational and ſpiritual. Many have received from nature a ſoft and tender heart, and are moved on all occaſions in the moſt ſenſible manner; their mind and their imagination are ever alert and buſy. They have an influence on all their actions. Do they conſider their failings and ſins? Sorrow pervades their ſoul, and burſts from their eyes in a torrent of tears. Do they repreſent to themſelves the grace of God, the love of the Redeemer, or the happineſs of heaven? they are loſt in the moſt pleaſing admiration, and their joy proceeds to extaſy. But, are not ſuch chriſ-

chriſtians deceived, when they imagine that the degree of ſorrow, or of joy, to which they attain, is a general and eſſential token of true chriſtianity? Are they not over-haſty in their judgement, when they reckon all for unconverted and vicious men, who, in theſe reſpects, cannot do the like? We muſt therefore never conclude, from what we feel and experience, that all ſincere worſhipers of God and Chriſt ought to feel in the ſame manner and the ſame degree. No more muſt we take the experiences of others for the unqualified model of our imitation. Many a ſincere chriſtian, by not attending to this rule, has embarraſſed himſelf in the greateſt difficulties. He reads, or he hears, that this or the other ſaint, in his penitence, fell into an uncommon and continued ſorrow; that he felt an extraordinary remorſe, and for a long time was inconſolably afflicted, and, day and night, lamented and bewailed his ſins—and the like. From want of know-

ledge,

ledge, he conceives this to be a neceſſary part of real repentance, and that he muſt experience the very ſame before he can properly ſay he is converted. Accordingly he torments himſelf ſo long, till he thinks he is come up to the pattern before him; let his nature and conſtitution oppoſe itſelf as ſtrongly as it may. But can ſuch violent and unnatural feelings deſerve the name of ſpiritual and godly experiences of the power of religion? Can you poſſibly imagine, Sirs, that theſe agitations can be agreeable to the Creator of our frame, who requires of us a voluntary worſhip and a rational obedience? Certainly not. He has, indeed, patience with theſe infirmities; but they are contrary to his deſigns, in oppoſition to his will, and can only tend to the prejudice of him that entertains them.

Laſtly, in theſe ſpiritual experiences we muſt never forget the enlightening of our mind, and the uſe of our reaſon. This

is a common fault with numbers of chriſtians. They are ſo much employed in exciting ſenſual ſenſations in themſelves, and in obtaining what they often falſely term ſpiritual experience, that they give themſelves little or no concern about cultivating the nobler part of their being, their rational ſpirit, and bringing it to a higher degree of perfection. They prefer the violent ebullitions of their blood to the tranquil operations of reaſon, and ſeem to be all ſenſation. Their knowledge is, therefore, generally very obſcure and imperfect; they regard the augmentation and improvement of it as merely a bye-work of little importance. Their feelings compenſate the injuries of ignorance and error: they think ſentiment the ſafeſt guide. Nay, they go ſo far as to ſcorn the ſuggeſtions of reaſon, and take all poſſible care not to make uſe of her precepts, or follow her light. Such diſpoſitions naturally lead to fanaticiſm, and to all the extravagances attend-

attendant on it. So ſoon as we neglect the uſe of reaſon, we are immediately in danger of being deceived and ſeduced by our own hearts. Experience and fancy may be eaſily confounded in a warm imagination: how are we to diſcriminate them from each other, unleſs we are guided in our judgement by an enlightened and a trained underſtanding? And what is all our religion and virtue, if it be not founded on knowledge and certainty? Can we emancipate ourſelves from the bonds of ſuperſtition, if we act not from argument, but merely from impulſe? Indeed, the more clear our knowledge is, the more juſtly and ſolidly we accuſtom ourſelves to think; ſo much the more gentle and orderly will our emotions be, ſo much the more rational and conſiſtent our ſpiritual experiences. But, even this brings us nearer to perfection; it gives our worſhip and our virtue a real value; it renders our conduct harmonious, and fits us thereby, by degrees, for that

pure

pure and exalted devotion in which the inhabitants of heaven are employed.

Theſe, Sirs, are the principal rules we muſt obſerve, in regard to ſpiritual experiences, if we would be ſafe from the extravagancies of ſuperſtition, and the follies of fanaticiſm.

You will much miſtake my meaning, however, if you draw from it this falſe concluſion; that all that is hereby ſaid of ſpiritual experience reſts on the imagination alone, and that the bare knowledge of religion is ſufficient to ſalvation. No. No one can be a true chriſtian, who does not confeſs and experience the godly influence of the doctrines of Jeſus, and diſplay the fruit of them in his whole deportment. Your knowledge, chriſtians, muſt be lively and active; you muſt moderate your affection for earthly things; you muſt purify your hearts, and direct your inclinations

tions to worthy objects; you must reform, regenerate, and amend, and regulate every part of your conduct, if you would be happy. Try yourselves by these marks, and rest not in the outward privileges and tokens of christians. If you can reflect upon sin without hatred and abhorrence, on goodness and virtue without esteem and love; on the favour of God, and the example of Jesus, without admiration and gratitude; and the bliss of heaven, without aspirations after it; if all these have but a feeble or no influence at all on your resolutions and actions, you are then of the number of those hypocrites who deny by their works what they confess in their words.—Would you avoid the dreadful lot, which, as such, you must expect for eternity, expand your hearts to the salutary effects of the religion of Jesus. Let the doctrines it teaches us be powerful in you. Follow their suggestions, and testify the integrity of your faith by an unremit-

ted ardour in all good works. Call upon God for his powerful aſſiſtance in theſe arduous endeavours, and beware of grieving the ſpirit of grace by pertinacious oppoſition. Thus will you know, as our Saviour declares, that his doctrine is from God. You will remember that it has the power to render its ſincere followers virtuous, holy, tranquil, chearful, and happy; that it will ſupport you in all trials, and comfort you in all afflictions; that it will not leave you even in the ſhades of death; and that you will thereby obtain the actual poſſeſſion of that vaſt felicity it aſſures us of.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.